COVID-19 Energy Sector Response Efforts and Frequently Asked Questions

This document is the product of collaborative efforts to gather current information. We appreciate everyone's patience during this dynamic event. Send any updates, concerns or questions to energyresponsecenter@hq.doe.gov. These Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be updated periodically as new information becomes available.

CURRENT STATUS OF DOE RESPONSE EFFORTS

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security, and Emergency Response (CESER) began monitoring the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in January 2020. Within CESER, the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #12 Energy Response Organization (ERO) continues to support the federal mitigation and response to COVID-19. CESER and the ERO continue to coordinate with federal, state, and energy sector partners to discuss preparations, provide awareness, and assess issues that may require federal support.

UPDATE: To limit the spread of COVID-19 and ensure a continued healthy workforce, Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm released the DOE COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan on March 2, 2021. This plan continues to maximize telework for DOE employees, contractors, and those at DOE sites and facilities to protect the health and safety of the workforce.

UPDATE: The ERO and ESF #12 team is supporting the President's COVID-19 National Strategy, which activated the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to support COVID-19 vaccine delivery. ESF #12 has been activated in the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) and the Regional Coordinators are at enhanced watch supporting their regions with vaccination implementation plans. The ERO continues to support industry requests for information related to the ongoing pandemic, recent cyber-attacks, and monitoring the overall heightened threat environment. The ERO continues to evaluate and share information on processes and procedures for energy sector worker prioritization, state vaccination distribution plans, and access to Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and testing during the emerging threat of increased COVID-19 cases. DOE continues to work closely with partners to help facilitate safe response and restoration activities during the pandemic for winter storms.

CESER advises energy sector partners to remain vigilant to cybersecurity threats. Energy sector partners are encouraged to work with the Electricity Information Sharing and Analysis Center (E-ISAC), the Downstream Natural Gas ISAC (DNG-ISAC), and the Oil and Natural Gas ISAC (ONG-ISAC) to remain vigilant to cybersecurity threats, including COVID-19 themed phishing emails, and to ensure that the latest guidance is provided to their organizations.

In response to COVID-19, the U.S. energy sector has taken actions to mitigate potential impacts on the industry's workforce and operations. CESER also urges energy sector companies to assess the full breadth of risk within the supply chain, including that of managed and industry service providers to evaluate how COVID-19 may affect service.

COVID-19 RESOURCES

Government Web Links:
- DOE: Coronavirus Hub
- CDC: COVID-19 Data Summary
- CDC: Vaccine Homepage
- UPDATE: CDC: Vaccination Progress Tracker
- UPDATE: CDC: National Forum on COVID-19 Vaccine
- OSHA: COVID-19 Control and Prevention
- World Health Organization: Coronavirus homepage
- DHS CISA: COVID-19 Homepage and Risk Management for COVID-19
- DHS CISA: Guidance on Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce
- FEMA: National Business EOC Operations Dashboard
- FEMA: Coronavirus Rumor Control
- TSA: COVID-19 Enrollment Questions

Energy Sector Links:
- American Public Power Association (APPA): Coronavirus page
- American Gas Association (AGA): Coronavirus page
- American Petroleum Institute (API): Pandemic Resources page
- American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM): COVID-19 page
- American Public Gas Association (APGA): Coronavirus Resources page
- Edison Electric Institute (EEI): Pandemic page
- Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI): COVID-19 Page
- Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC): COVID-19 Resources
- International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC): COVID-19 Update page
- International Liquid Terminals Association (ILTA): Pandemic Resources page
- Interstate Natural Gas Association of America (INGAA): COVID-19 Response page
- UPDATE: National Propane Gas Association (NPGA): Hours of Service Waivers page
- National Rural Electric Cooperatives (NRECA): COVID-19 page
- Petroleum Marketers Association of America (PMAA): Coronavirus Resources page
- Offshore Operators Committee: COVID-19 Mitigations page

State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Web Links:
- UPDATE: National Governors Association (NGA) State Phased Vaccine Allocation Table
- National Governors Association (NGA) State Coronavirus Actions
- National Conference of State Legislations (NCSL) State Legislator COVID-19 Resources
- National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO) Support for State Energy Offices
- National Association of State Regulators (NARUC) COVID News and Resources
- National Association of Counties (NaCo) County and State Emergency Declaration Map

WHAT GUIDANCE IS AVAILABLE FOR ENERGY SECTOR PERSONNEL & SOCIAL DISTANCING?

Protective measures for access to homes and businesses with restricted access should follow CDC and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidance:

- CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers
- UPDATE: OSHA: Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace
- OSHA guidance for workers performing in-home repairs services.

ARE ENERGY PERSONNEL AND SERVICES CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL?

CESER worked with industry and DHS CISA to put together a list of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers (ECIW), which included electricity (across all sources), petroleum, natural gas, and propane workers. UPDATE: DHS CISA updated the guidance on December 16, 2020.

On December 9, 2020, the National Governors Association (NGA) published a report on supporting an equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. NGA also sent a memorandum to Governors and their Energy Advisors on March 25, 2020, highlighting three areas where Governors can support the energy sector during the pandemic response.

UPDATE: NGA revised the letter on December 15, 2020. The three items identified are:

1) Ensure critical energy infrastructure employees can be identified and credentialed in the event of a shelter in place order
2) Critical infrastructure workers may need priority access to vaccine distribution, testing, PPE, and cleaning supplies
3) Waivers for fuel carrier standards and commercial driver's licenses may be needed to move critical utility supplies

UPDATE: On May 6, 2020 and January 15, 2021, former DOE Secretary Dan Brouillette sent letters to all U.S. Governors encouraging them to prioritize critical infrastructure mission-essential workers during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The January letter asked that the critical energy infrastructure workforce be prioritized for receipt of the COVID-19 vaccine, in both the public and private sector, including: investor owned utilities, municipal-owned utilities, cooperatives, members of the oil and natural gas subsector, DOE's Power Marketing Administrations, and National Nuclear Security Administration sites. Reliance on energy is a key interdependency amongst all Critical Infrastructure sectors, making energy reliability and resilience a fundamental need for national safety and security.

HOW CAN MY COMPANY ACQUIRE PPE FOR ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL?

DOE continues to support the safety and security of the energy sector workforce who maintain the surety of our energy system 24/7. Providing for this vital strategic asset helps maintain the American way of life and underpins the strength of our national security. Energy sector companies are monitoring the availability of PPE for essential workers. The CDC issued a PPE optimization strategy for use when PPE supplies are stressed, running low, or absent. UPDATE: On December 31,

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2020, FEMA published a Temporary Final Rule to extend, with certain modifications, the PPE Allocation order for domestic use through June 30, 2021.

HOW CAN MY COMPANY ACQUIRE TESTING FOR ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL?

CESER worked with multiple FEMA task forces and federal, industry and state partners to identify new testing options and best practices as they became available. Energy industry suppliers and infrastructure operators are identified "essential" and "mission essential" employees for prioritized COVID-19 testing. More information regarding prioritized testing requests can be found in this industry letter to national organizations representing state and local government leaders. The ESCC updated Testing and Protecting Mission Essential Control Center and Generation Facility Personnel.

On April 23, 2020, DHS CISA released guidance for operations centers and control rooms across the 16 critical infrastructure sectors, including energy, required to operate in a pandemic environment. The guidance recommends prioritized testing by medical professionals for asymptomatic personnel performing essential jobs in support of operations centers and control rooms. Some states have begun prioritizing testing of non-symptomatic essential energy workers prior to sequestration.

COVID testing locations can be found on the State Health Department websites.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COVID-19 TESTS?

There are two types of tests available for COVID-19 according to the CDC: viral tests and antibody tests. A viral test is used to detect a current infection. An antibody test can detect a previous COVID-19 infection. An antibody test may not show a current infection and should not be used as the only way to diagnose someone with a current COVID-19 infection. UPDATE: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) further describes the two types of viral tests—molecular tests, such as RT-PCR tests, and antigen or rapid result tests—and their usage.

UPDATE: WHICH VACCINES ARE CURRENTLY AUTHORIZED FOR USE?

Currently, three COVID-19 vaccines are authorized and recommended for use in the United States. The FDA issued an Emergency Use Authorization for use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in persons aged 16 years and older and the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson's vaccines for use in individuals 18 years of age and older. The FDA continues to oversee and monitor the production of these vaccines to ensure continuing safety. The CDC created a comprehensive COVID-19 vaccine page with additional information.

UPDATE: HOW ARE ESSENTIAL CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE WORKERS BEING PRIORITIZED FOR VACCINE DISTRIBUTION?

The CDC released guidance based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). On February 19, 2021, the CDC updated its COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Recommendations, which include energy essential workers in Phase 1b and 1c. While states often follow ACIP guidance, federal recommendations are not binding and some states may choose

to depart from the prioritization sequence outlined by ACIP. The NGA is tracking state and territorial plans for phased vaccine allocations and updating a Table on a bi-weekly basis.

WHAT IS THE GUIDANCE ON MAINTAINING A SAFE WORKPLACE FOR CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE WORKERS?

UPDATE: The ESCC COVID-19 Resource Guide, updated on February 24, 2021, provides the electric sector with methods to assess and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent update added an example COVID-19 Risk Evaluation Index, guidance for identifying critical control center personnel, and lessons learned from 2020 emergency response efforts.

The Oil and Natural Gas Subsector Coordinating Council (ONG SCC) released the ONG COVID-19 Responsible Recovery Compendium identifying challenges and mitigation strategies for the different ONG value chains.

UPDATE: The CDC updated Critical Infrastructure Sector Response Planning on December 3, 2020, noting:
- Growing evidence of transmission risk from infected people without symptoms or before the onset of recognized symptoms (pre-symptomatic)
- Ongoing community transmission in many parts of the country
- Continued focus on reducing transmission through social distancing and other personal prevention strategies
- All workers should wear a cloth mask in accordance with CDC and OSHA guidance and any state or local requirements
- Reintegration of exposed critical infrastructure workers who are not experiencing any symptoms and have not tested positive back into onsite operations should be used as a last resort and only in limited circumstances, such as when cessation of operation of a facility may cause serious harm or danger to public health or safety

HOW ARE WELLNESS CHECKS BEING IMPLEMENTED IN THE SECTOR?

Based on the CDC guidance to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 and the OSHA guidance to prevent exposure in the workplace many organizations are implementing wellness checks throughout the work shifts of essential workers. The wellness checks may include questions on how the workers are feeling and a temperature check to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. The medical or non-medical professionals conducting the wellness checks should have instructions on how to proceed and who to notify if symptoms of COVID-19 are detected.

WHICH TYPES OF RESTRICTIONS MAY AFFECT ACCESS?

Domestic travel advisories are not expected to affect critical services or travel for energy sector essential employees. The advisories do not apply to employees for critical infrastructure as defined by the DHS essential staff guidance, which includes energy sector services and personnel supporting essential energy services.

UPDATE: Several states have continued mandatory or recommended travel advisories that apply a quarantine period ranging from 1-2 weeks on travelers from areas with identified hot spots or

increased rates of COVID-19 infections. Some FEMA regions have worked with the states and territories to develop pre-travel programs to test essential workers, prior to arrival. In cases where access is restricted, the states have defined protocols for allowing access for essential personnel.

The CDC updated travel health notices to include COVID-19 travel recommendations by country. Although the CDC recommends people stay home as much as possible, there is guidance for the different modes of travel for when travel is required. UPDATE: All air passengers coming into the United States, including U.S. citizens, are required to have a negative COVID-19 test result or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 before they board a flight to the U.S. On January 29, 2021, the CDC issued an Order requiring the wearing of masks on all forms of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports.

On January 20, 2021, President Biden signed an Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing, requiring that all on-duty or on-site Federal employees; on-site Federal contractors; and all persons in Federal buildings or on Federal lands individuals comply with CDC guidelines, including wearing masks and maintaining physical distance.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT ROLE OF THE NATIONAL GUARD?

The President issued a Memorandum, offering National Guard troops to support states by operating under Title 32 status. This allows the National Guard to be managed by state Governors, but be funded by FEMA and DHS. Additional detail on National Guard activities in states can be found on the COVID-19 Response website. UPDATE: On January 21, 2021, a presidential memorandum extended and modified funding for National Guard units under state control to September 30, 2021, with certain cost share provisions.

WHAT ARE THE U.S. CANADA AND U.S. MEXICO BORDER TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS?

UPDATE: The United States and Canada, as well as the United States and Mexico are temporarily restricting travel across the U.S. border and may require proof of a negative COVID-19 test. The restriction allows travel for essential workers and deliveries for supply chains to ensure that food, fuel, and life-saving medicines are maintained. DOE ESF#12 responders are available to work with the FEMA NRCC and DHS to coordinate any issues with critical energy infrastructure located near the U.S. border and for travel across the border to support critical work. Updated guidance for travel to the U.S./Canada can be found here and for U.S./Mexico here.

HOW CAN MY COMPANY ENSURE TIMELY AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORT OF GOODS AND SERVICES?

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Emergency Declaration
The DOT Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) issued a Federal Motor Carrier Administration Declaration and an updated Expanded Emergency Declaration that provides regulatory relief for commercial motor vehicle operations that are providing direct assistance in support of emergency relief efforts related to COVID-19. UPDATE: In February 2021, FMCSA extended the modified hour of service waiver to May 31, 2021.

- FMCSA COVID [Emergency Declarations, Waivers, Exemptions and Permits](#) homepage

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PORT ACCESS?

The Coast Guard has issued multiple Marine Safety Information Bulletins (MSIB) on the Novel Coronavirus. To view the most recent MSIB regarding COVID-19, refer to the Coast Guard [MSIB Publications](#). The Coast Guard recommends that people review the CDC [travel guidance](#) and the U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisories](#) related to COVID-19.

HOW DID THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT & INDUSTRY PREPARE TO RESPOND DURING THE PANDEMIC?

The [Electric Subsector Coordinating Council](#) has a dedicated team analyzing how restoration processes and procedures may need to be modified given the known health risks. During non-health emergencies, such as severe storms, electric utilities, independent power producers and suppliers often accelerate power restoration by bringing in additional skilled workers from organizations and contractors outside the area through mutual assistance. These mutual assistance processes were demonstrated during the multiple hurricanes, storms and wildfires that occurred in 2020. For these responses, the mutual aid process brought in additional workers and equipment from nearby utilities and contractors to assist with assessment and repair. Crews utilized PPE and social distancing per the CDC and OSHA guidelines to perform their restoration duties.

The NGA issued a [memo](#) with planning considerations for concurrent emergencies during the on-going COVID-19 health crisis. The memo encourages Governors to work across the emergency management enterprise to prepare for a confluence of events to ensure that their states are ready to protect lives and property.

UPDATE: The National Flood Services released a report on [How to Prepare for the Hurricane Season 2021](#). The CDC consolidated resources for [Natural Disasters, Severe Weather and COVID-19](#) to help guide hurricane safety, public disaster shelter practices, and wildfire smoke considerations.

WHAT IS CONTACT TRACING AND HOW DOES IT APPLY TO ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE CRITICAL WORKERS?

[Contact tracing](#) is a strategy employed by local and state health department personnel with specialized training to prevent further spread of COVID-19. Contact tracing is one part of the process to control the spread of the disease, supporting patients, and warning contacts of exposure. To protect patient privacy, contacts are only informed that they may have been exposed to a patient with the infection. They are not told the identity of the patient who may have exposed them. The CDC released a [Contact Tracing Training Plan](#) and [resources](#) for medical professionals and local health department personnel. The ESCC drafted a set of [planning considerations](#) that can help the electric power industry develop approaches that fit local conditions. Some local and state governments are also launching contact tracing programs to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

UPDATE: The CDC updated contact tracing resources for health departments on March 1, 2021 and released an infographic on February 26 2021.

WHAT GUIDANCE HAS BEEN ISSUED TO INDUSTRY TO ENSURE ENERGY RELIABILITY AMID POTENTIAL CORONAVIRUS IMPACTS?

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), in consultation with FERC, as well as the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety Administration (PHMSA) has issued guidance to provide additional flexibility to operators and staff to help ensure continued operations. Operators for transportation including hazardous liquid and gas pipeline, underground natural gas storage, liquefied natural gas, and bulk electric systems are focusing their resources on keeping people safe and providing critical services during this unprecedented public health emergency. Additional guidance: PHMSA Stay of Enforcement, Guidance for State Partners, and the NERC and FERC Industry Guidance to Ensure Grid Reliability.

NERC issued a special report Pandemic Preparedness and Operational Assessment assessing the reliability considerations and operational preparedness of the bulk power system owners and operators during pandemic conditions.

In November 2020, NERC issued its 2020-2021 Winter Reliability Assessment. The assessment finds sufficient resource capacity is in place across North America to meet winter demand. Noting how extreme weather can challenge grid reliability in specific areas, the assessment identifies higher risk areas that are susceptible to emergency operating actions.