



Est. 2008

“To support and promote statewide emergency preparedness, disaster response, and mutual aid between water and wastewater utilities responding to major emergencies.”

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Advisory – Potential Availability of Cloth Masks for the Water Sector

A workgroup was convened to provide feedback to a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) request for information regarding water sector personal protective equipment (PPE) use and needs. The workgroup consisted of representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as well as the following associations: Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA), Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA), American Water Works Association (AWWA), National Rural Water Association (NRWA), Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), Water Environment Federation (WEF), and the Water Information Sharing and Analysis Center (WaterISAC).

Upon receipt of the information, FEMA immediately offered shipment of reusable cloth masks to water and wastewater utilities. FEMA intends to send out approximately 7 million masks direct to critical infrastructure sectors (water sector is one of 16) and states. Orders will be filled each week as production catches up to the demand. FEMA has not shared how many of the 7 million masks and future orders will be allocated to the water sector or how long the distribution of masks will continue. There have been no shipments to date as FEMA determines a process for distributing to the critical infrastructure sector. FEMA is aware the water sector would prefer N95 or other types of mask for operations, but currently those remain prioritized for healthcare.

The workgroup is collaborating on the most efficient and equitable process for requesting and distributing the PPE to ensure all water and wastewater utilities (regardless of type, size, or affiliation) have an opportunity to obtain the PPE. Currently, the mask shipments are being coordinated through the Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN) Chair in each state, who will then identify utilities that are willing and able to serve as points of distribution for other utilities in the state. Requests for PPE are currently prioritized based on the number of COVID-19 cases in the state; states with more cases receive priority for requests.

Some states have already set up a request and distribution process while other still need to work out the details. More information will be provided as request and distribution processes are determined. It is important to note that all requests should be critical need only as these are washable cloth masks that can be reused up to 15 times. As demand is expected to be higher than supply, it is recommended that masks be allocated at a rate of 2 masks per full-time employee (FTE), with priority to staff working on-site. If FEMA continues to support mask distribution, allocations per FTE can increase.

InWARN has established distribution location across the State of Indiana. As additional details become available, this information will be distributed to our members and partners.