

COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS TELECONFERENCE

REGION 7 REGIONAL RESPONSE TEAM ACTIVATION DRILL



21 April 2020, 10:00–10:52

Purpose: Co-Chairs of the Region 7 Regional Response Team (RRT-7) conducted an incident-specific activation drill to evaluate response readiness as alternative work practices are implemented by 15 federal and four state agencies that comprise the RRT-7 voting membership. Agencies were instructed to identify a replacement to join the call in cases when their respective Primary and Alternate RRT-7 representatives were not available to participate.

Participants were asked to report on COVID-19-related impacts to pollution response programs; specifically, changes to work status/activities and decreases in capabilities that may affect the agency's response posture.

Agency Report Outs: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Co-Chair Ken Buchholz facilitated agency report outs and regularly checked for the presence of agencies not responding during the initial roll call.

1. EPA Region 7 – Co-Chair Ken Buchholz

- a. Work Status:** Nearly 100 percent of staff are teleworking, although mission-critical employees and contractors can currently enter EPA facilities. Generally, time-critical response work is paused; requests for assistance from states/locals evaluated on a case-by-case basis; and planning for potential mid-May re-engagement of routine field activities but no date set.

Numerous pandemic-specific activities are underway in various EPA offices, including:

- Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is working on press releases related to Superfund sites, increased flexibility for disinfectant manufacturers, and needs of EPA's Water Workforce Initiative; keeping stakeholders informed of program impacts; and responding to media inquiries.
- Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention (OCSPP) is discussing emergency exemptions for unregistered uses of pesticides to address certain emergency conditions; and addressing multiple inquiries regarding certain disinfectant products.
- Office of Superfund Remediation and Technology Innovation (OSRTI) completed final draft of interim health/safety guidelines related to COVID-19 for conducting Superfund site work

- b. Response Posture:** All 10 EPA regions activated their continuity of operations (COOP) plans, including Pandemic Annexes in these plans; regional emergency operations centers (EOC) are activated; and EPA Headquarters' (HQ) EOC activated for national COVID-19 coordination.

- EPA HQ providing remote emergency support functions (ESF)-10 support to Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Response Coordination Center (NRCC), which is activated to Level 1 (all ESFs staffed).
- EPA Regions 3, 5, and 9 received mission assignments to provide remote ESF-10 support to the FEMA Regional Response Coordination Centers (RRCC) in these regions. Thus far, no FEMA mission assignment received by EPA Region 7.
- Some seasonal planning for hurricane and flood response is currently underway.

2. U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Eighth District (D8) – Co-Chair Michael Sams

- a. Work Status:** Vast majority of personnel have been teleworking since March 16 with only essential personnel working at the USCG D8 office in New Orleans. Travel is significantly curtailed and all meetings are cancelled, postponed, or modified to a virtual format. All National Preparedness for



Response Exercise Program (PREP) activities, including Government Initiated Unannounced Exercises (GIUE) and Preparedness Assessment Visits, are postponed until further notice.

- b. Response Posture:** Performing all missions while implementing recommended COVID-19 protocols. Specifically, pollution preparedness and response posture continue, but Captains of the Port and Federal On-Scene Coordinators have discretion to determine which incidents warrant actual field response activities. An Area Command has been established to provide oversight of COVID-19 operations, identify shortfalls/issues, and facilitate reporting up the chain of command. D8 field commands are employing various staffing models to ensure mission execution while limiting numbers of on-site personnel.

3. Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) – No report

4. Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) – Joe Dom

- a. Work Status:** Vast majority of staff are teleworking with all in-person meetings and travel cancelled.
- b. Response Posture:** COOP plan has been activated and emergency responses continue while observing recommended COVID-19 protocols. The department is currently operating with full capabilities; however, large reduction in oil/gas sales will affect future funding of KDHE programs.

5. Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) – No report

6. Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) – Brad Harris

- a. Work Status:** Vast majority of staff have been teleworking since March 18. Critical services such as laboratory functions continue with restrictions (i.e., social distancing). Investigations and inspections have ceased. Governor Parson indicated State offices may begin to reopen on May 4.
- b. Response Posture:** Environmental Emergency Response (EER) Section maintains its typical response posture with only slightly longer response times. EER Section is down to 14 total staff and just seven spill line Duty Officers. EER Duty Officers are working a 24-hour shifts to address the staffing shortage. MDNR's Division of Environmental Quality is working on guidelines needed to restart field work.

7. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) – Adam Davis

- a. Work Status:** All staff are teleworking except National Weather Service field office personnel.
- b. Response Posture:** Default posture is immediate provision of remote support services. NOAA will assess incidents on a case-by-case basis and respond to the field when warranted in accord with COVID-19 protocols.

8. Department of Defense, Defense Coordinating Element 7 and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – No report

9. U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) – Sybil Chandler

- a. Work Status:** Kansas City office staff have been teleworking since mid-March. Kansas City National Security Campus is reduced to 500 staff but preparing facility reoccupation plans to add back 300 additional employees.
- b. Response Posture:** Facility response capabilities are intact.



10. **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services** – No report
11. **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service (FS)** – John LaCoste
 - a. **Work Status:** FS staff at Mark Twain National Forest have been teleworking since mid-March. All trainings and meetings utilize a virtual format.
 - b. **Response Posture:** Dispatch is fully staffed and response capabilities are intact. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) received a COVID-19 mission assignment from FEMA and attends regular coordination calls with states.
12. **U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FEMA** – No report
13. **U.S. Department of Transportation, Pipeline & Hazardous Materials Safety Administration** – No report
14. **U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)** – Courtney Hoover
 - a. **Work Status:** All staff working virtually with a few personnel occasionally in the office to retrieve documents and/or conduct outreach to partner organizations. Travel is cancelled through end of May and spill response training in Denver (scheduled for last week of May) is likely cancelled.
 - b. **Response Posture:** Communications across bureaus/offices and partner organizations continue as normal. However, emergency response deployments must be approved at the bureau level. While staff deployments will be somewhat delayed, responses capabilities are intact.
15. **U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration** – Jo Beth Cholmondeley
 - a. **Telework:** Vast majority of staff are teleworking. Planned program work is paused and in-person meetings/events are cancelled.
 - b. **Response posture:** Mission-critical work such as complaint resolutions and death investigations continue. Staff traveling to sites have necessary PPE and new safety guidelines for conducting site work. Reconstitution plan is being reviewed, although a date for its implementation has not been announced.
16. **U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)** – Zane Steves
 - a. **Telework:** All staff are teleworking.
 - b. **Response Posture:** Operational readiness at normal level. No FEMA mission assignments have been received.
17. **U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)** – Dana Kreeger
 - a. **Work Status:** Most staff teleworking with reduced workforce in offices. Office staff reduced by 75 percent in mid-March and working staggered shifts. Non-essential travel and training has been cancelled.
 - b. **Response posture:** Personnel working remotely are on one-hour recall status to staff response operations or other mission-critical activities. Intelligence functions are being provided through remote support services. FBI's dispatch center and Strategic Information & Operations Center (SIOC) are fully staffed. Return to normal staffing and operations in mid-May is under consideration.
18. **U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission** – No report
19. **U.S. Department of State** – No report

