

# URBAN WATER INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER



Term: Fall | Issue 5 | Date: September 1, 2020

## COVID-19: At Work

### Planning ~~For~~ During A Pandemic

News cycles, and lives, can change in an instant. In January, while most of us were focused on the tragic death of Kobe Bryant or the raging wildfires in Australia, thousands of miles away people were experiencing the beginnings of what has now become the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Fast forward a few weeks, and our lives changed virtually overnight. Our once simple work-life routines - going to the grocery store, taking kids to daycare or school, and heading to work came to a screeching halt. For water utilities, this meant rapidly responding to the changes in employees' life situations as well as making operational adjustments like limiting staffing at the treatment facilities, splitting schedules to keep workers physically distant, figuring out how to transition to working remotely, and even suspending water shutoffs.

There is never a good time for a pandemic, but March 2020 might be as close as it could get. Why? In 2018 the U.S. passed the America's Water Infrastructure Act requiring water utilities to expand their risk assessments to include the emergency management community's All-Hazards approach. With deadlines for larger ... (see page two for more)

## In Focus: Water Resources

### New Paradigms In Water Resources Consulting

Who would have thought, that just a year ago those of us in private practice, providing professional services in Water Resources Planning, Design and Construction Management Services, would be facing a major "Paradigm Change" in delivering those services to our private and public sector clients.

With the advent of the COVID-19 Pandemic and its major impacts on our ability to meet with our clients in person as well as conduct our day to day practice functions in our offices, has created both positive and negative effects, that require a complete "Rethinking" of how we function as professionals. All of us are experiencing the need to adapt to virtual meeting software applications to meet with our clients and consulting team members. ... (see page four for more)

## California Fires

### State of the California 2020 Fire Season

The 2020 California wildfire season has turned into a series of ongoing wildfires that are burning across the state of. The peak of the wildfire season usually occurs between August and November when hot, dry winds are most frequent. The wildfire season typically does not end until the first significant rainstorm of winter arrives, which is usually around October in Northern California, and roughly between late October to December in Southern California. As of August 21, 2020, a total of 6,871 fires have burned 1,417,146 acres (573,499 ha) according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.



On August 19, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom reported that the state was battling 367 known fires, many sparked by intense thunderstorms on August 16-17 caused by moisture from Tropical Storm Fausto. Response and evacuations were complicated by a historic heatwave and the ... (see page four for more)

## Meet Our Sponsors

### Meet Webinar Sponsor West Basin Municipal Water District (West Basin) & Water Replenishment District (WRD)

West Basin is a wholesale water agency that serves nearly one million people in 17 cities and unincorporated areas in Los Angeles County.

West Basin provides imported drinking water, recycled water, as well as conservation and education programs.

You're invited to learn more about West Basin's commitment to protecting, diversifying, and securing our water supply while continuing a history of innovation and industry leadership, through its Water for Tomorrow program by visiting -

[www.westbasin.org/waterfortomorrow](http://www.westbasin.org/waterfortomorrow)



The Water Replenishment District (WRD) is the largest groundwater agency in the State of California, managing and protecting local groundwater resources for over four million residents within 420 square miles in southern Los Angeles County.

The 43 cities in the service area use approximately 250,000 acre-feet (82 billion gallons) of groundwater annually which accounts for half of the region's water supply.

To increase the sustainability and resilience of Southern Los Angeles County's water, WRD created the Water Independence Now (WIN) program to expand the use of recycled water resources to recharge the basin using a completely locally sustainable source of water for replenishment needs. For more information, visit [www.wrd.org](http://www.wrd.org).



## COVID-19 - At Work (continued)

(from page one) ... utilities (>100,000 population served) at the end of March 2020, this meant that risk assessments were completed, and the subsequent emergency response planning was underway by the time the pandemic reached the U.S.

Early on, East Valley Water District (EVWD) identified the importance of getting ahead of the incident to prevent any service disruptions. The pandemic impacted supplies from vendors almost immediately. PPE and cleaning supplies became scarce. Employees now needed to stay at home to support the effort of stopping the virus while adjusting to working remotely and caring for children at home due to school closures. With worker safety the priority, Arcadis and EVWD reviewed the best options to implement the CDC's guidance. First, physically distance workers from the hazard - working remotely, separating the workforce. Second, re-define the physical space by moving chairs and tables to create barriers and space, keep doors open, and reduce as many touchable surfaces as possible. And, finally, supply workers with appropriate PPE. Throughout this process EVWD staff had regular internal communication to keep employees informed on the dynamic environment and need for rapid adaptation.

Arcadis led EVWD throughout the process by implementing EVWD's newly developed Incident Management Team (IMT), a structure defined by the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and adopted in EVWD's AWIA-compliant Emergency Response Plan. The IMT worked with Arcadis facilitators to essentially train in real-time to familiarize themselves with the process of deciding each new set of actions and to document everything, including costs, all during a pandemic. With Arcadis-led local and state interaction, EVWD compiled the appropriate forms for potential FEMA reimbursement of costs associated with their COVID-19 response.

Arcadis works with utilities daily to leverage the best tools, subject matter experts, and utility resources for developing plans and improving processes. The efforts of the EVWD team demonstrated the value of planning - better, faster, and more adaptable response to protect lives.

*Contributed By: Susan Wyatt, Sr. Resiliency Consultant, Arcadis And Cecilia Contreras, East Valley Water District*

## In The News: UWI Webinar Was A Great Success

Urban Water Institute hosted "A Discussion With Felicia Marcus & Pat Mulroy" Webinar, powered by Zoom on August 19, 2020.

It was a great success with over 110 guests participating in the discussion.

As a result, UWI was able to post the entire webinar on their website. It can be viewed on their website at:

<https://www.urbanwater.com/presentation-archives/>

UWI next webinar is a "Discussion with Jeff Kightlinger, General Manager of Metropolitan Water District" on Wednesday, October, 21, 2020 beginning at 9:30am.



## COVID-19: Going Virtual

### COVID Chronicles: EOCWD Goes Virtual To Complete Disaster Plan During Pandemic

The East Orange County Water District began the year working on ways to reduce the impacts of natural disasters on water and sewer service. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic.

The district's work to guard against natural hazards took on new importance as management staff and a citizens committee were determined to complete the grant-funded project to develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). EOCWD, which serves a water and sewer customer base of more than 95,000 in parts of Orange, Tustin and Orange County unincorporated areas, had to quickly shift planning activities and public participation from in-person to virtual.

First, the district began conducting meetings of the HMP citizen committee completely online, including hosting presentations from the project consultant based in Idaho. Then, the district conducted a survey of residents using online tools and social media. More than 150 residents took the survey, which focused on personal disaster preparedness.

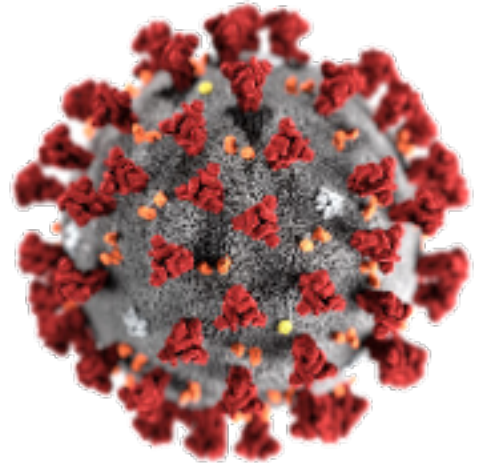
As the process neared completion in mid-summer, FEMA required a public meeting to be conducted – a near impossibility amidst COVID-19. But as President Kennedy once noted, crisis can also present unique opportunities, so the district hosted a Virtual Public Meeting on Facebook Live and YouTube. To entice viewers, the district selected two participants to receive a Red Cross Disaster Kit.

The district's outreach consultant, CommunicationsLAB, maintains a TV studio complete with high definition cameras and a green screen. Using this studio, the three speakers were able to maintain social distancing and were unmasked during a multi-hour rehearsal one-week before the live meeting date, as well as during the live meeting itself. CommLAB produced and scripted the 45-minute production (including Q&A period), which also featured disaster preparedness tips and B-Roll footage on district projects during transitions between speakers.

During a normal year, a public meeting offered at a high school gym along with doughnuts and coffee might draw 15 or 20 residents. Instead, EOCWD's Virtual Public Meeting was seen by more than 350 residents safely watching at home.

As the district looks ahead, there are no plans to permanently eliminate in-person outreach, which help build and establish relationships. But when faced with the uncertainty of a global pandemic, resilient new community connections and communication channels were developed for the moment, and for the future.

*Contributed By: Lisa Ohlund and Justin Glover on behalf of East Orange County Water District  
East Orange County Water District is a member of the Urban Water Institute.*



## California Fires (continued)

(from page one) .. ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The governor declared a state of emergency on August 18. A stunning, sudden surge of wildfires was burning through California at the end of August, threatening towns and sending choking smoke over major cities and across much of the United States. It's creating an epic compounding disaster whose ingredients have been brewing for years.

The blazes were ignited by a massive dry lightning storm earlier this week over many parts of the state but concentrated in the San Francisco Bay Area. "We had close to 11,000 strikes in a matter of three days," said Brice Bennett, a spokesperson for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire). "With an already-warm weather pattern and very, very dry conditions here in California, with those lightning strikes coming through, over 367 new fires were started."

"This is a big prolonged heat wave characterized not only by hot daytime temperatures, but also record warm overnight temperatures, and an unusual amount of humidity," said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California Los Angeles and a researcher at the National Center for Atmospheric Research. "It turns out increased humidity plays a role in why there are so many fires right now." A decaying tropical storm earlier this summer in the eastern Pacific Ocean sent a plume of moisture over California. Amid the scorching heat, the moisture formed clouds that generated immense amounts of wind, thunder, and lightning, but very little rain. "The humidity was high enough to produce these thunderstorms, but not high enough to produce significant flooding rainfall that would mitigate fire risk."

(Source: AccuWeather & Vox Media)

## In Focus: Water Resources (continued)

(from page one) ... In the case of our firm, which provides Program Management Water Resources services to City and Special District water and wastewater agencies, we have not seen a significant reduction in our consulting assignments, due to their designation by the Federal and State Government as essential services.

At this writing, our firm has found that positive effects have accrued, such as: reduction of travel time, and increased efficiency in administrative and operational functions. With more time available in the office, we have seen increased revenues resulting from increased billable time and greater efficiency in collaborating with clients using virtual meetings and cloud applications. This has allowed for greater access to program and project information data as well.

The only negative aspect I have experienced involves my role as a Lecturer at the University of California for the Senior Capstone Class in Civil & Environmental Engineering. We will no longer be meeting in person in large lecture halls; instead we will be looking at online learning for the next academic year.

This is necessitating a switch to virtual learning - using a totally different approach to lecturing, without the ability to have close contact for advising and mentoring students individually.

For smaller sized firms like ours, I see a trend to eventually move from having leased office space, to a hybrid model of work from home and the use of executive suite type shared workspaces, for in person meetings in the future, perhaps in perpetuity.

*Contributed By: C. Stephen Bucknam Jr, P.E., President Bucknam & Associates Inc.. Mr. Bucknam is a Board Member of Urban Water Institute.*

## California Legislative Update

The 2020 California Legislative session had a deadline on all bills set for August 31st. The COVID-19 pandemic precluded normal procedures and limited the ability to confer formally or informally on the individual proposals. September 30th is the last day for Governor Gavin Newsom to sign or veto bills.



One bill of particular interest in South Orange County and San Diego County was SB 1386 (Moorlach-R). This bill provides that fire hydrants are a part of water service for the purposes of Proposition 218 (1996). The bill had no opposition and moved to the Senate Floor for a final vote. It is expected to pass.

Opposition to AB 3030 (Kalra-D) has been voiced by a coalition of water agencies. This bill would establish new land, water, and ocean protection goals, including to protect 30% of the Nation's oceans. This bill has been held under submission in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

On a more positive note, Governor Newsom does not currently favor working under a Special Session and that is the good news of the month.

*Contributed By: Hon. Mary Aileen Matheis, Director, Irvine Ranch Water District Ms. Matheis is a Board Member of Urban Water Institute.*

THE URBAN WATER INSTITUTE  
PRESENTS AN INFORMATIVE DISCUSSION  
WITH

Jeff Kightlinger



GENERAL MANAGER OF  
METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT

**October 21, 2020**

9:30 AM PST

Zoom Meeting

**ATTENDANCE FEE: \$25**

*For more information, please contact the Urban Water Institute  
at (949) 679-9676 or [stacy@urbanwater.com](mailto:stacy@urbanwater.com)*