

**Representative Policy Board
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
Consumer Affairs Committee**

**October 18, 2021
Meeting Transcription**

- Stephen: Well, it is 5:30, and we do have a quorum, correct?
- Jennifer: Yes, that's correct.
- Stephen: Is that everybody, Jennifer?
- Jennifer: Yeah.
- Stephen: Okay. I will call the October Consumer Affairs Committee meeting to order. First item on the agenda is our safety moment, and it has to do with invasive species. Something we're all, at least the RPB members, are all familiar with because of a lot of reports from our land use committee. But some quick tips there for personal ways to deal with it. So, take a look at that for sure. Item two is approval of our minutes from the last meeting. Do I have a motion?
- Tony: So moved.
- Stephen: Thanks, Tony.
- Frank: Second. I'll second it, Steve.
- Stephen: Thank you. Any omissions, corrections, additions to the minutes? Hearing none. All those in favor?
- Group: Aye.
- Stephen: Any opposed? Any abstentions? Minutes carry unanimously. Today, we're fortunate to have Amanda Schenkle and Kate Novick, who's with Gradient Planning, at our meeting to talk about the 2022 business continuity work plan. I recently attended a tabletop exercise with Kate. She did a great job, and very happy to have her here today. Amanda, thank you. Do you want to provide any introductory remarks?
- Amanda: Thank you, Stephen. I'm the environmental health, safety, and risk manager with the authority. Kate and I have put together an updated presentation for you guys. It'll walk us through the RWA work plan related to our business continuity planning, and we will give you opportunities to jump in as we go if you have any questions. There's quite a bit of [inaudible] through this presentation. Jen, should I share my screen?
- Kate: I could-

Jennifer: Whatever you prefer. If you want me to, I can do it, or you can do it.

Amanda: Kate, if you have it up and ready and you want to, whichever you prefer.

Kate: I have it up and ready. I'll share the screen. Good evening, everyone. All right. So, here's a presentation about, as Amanda said, our business continuity work plan for this fiscal year. So, first of all, we based the plan on some things that have happened in the past couple of years. The most important one or the one that affects the Business Continuity Program the most is America's Water Infrastructure Act, which was passed several years ago. And it requires water utilities to perform a risk and resilience assessment of the water system, and then update the emergency response plan accordingly, based on the results of the risk assessment. So, we did this last year and the year before we started to do it. And we were fortunate because Regional Water Authority had voluntarily done a risk and resilience assessment in 2017. So, we could use that work and leverage it to comply with this requirement. So, this report gave us the direction for the Emergency Response Program at Regional Water Authority; identified our top risks, and what the next things that we need to work on are.

So, that's one of the key things that informed our business continuity work plan. The next item would be the COVID pandemic. Lessons learned from that, remote work, how did that go? That did definitely interrupt the world, and obviously, Regional Water was part of that. So, we incorporated our lessons learned into... We're working on incorporating that into our business continuity plan, going forward. But I should mention that Regional Water Authority already did have a pandemic response plan in place, so that was dusted off and used. And now that we've been through this major pandemic, we're making that part of the Business Continuity Program in a more integrated way. And then the next item would be, that Regional Water has a strategic goal this year to support climate and water quality resiliency. And as part of that, certainly, as we look at our weather-related risks and our response plans to weather-related events, we are doing that and incorporating that into our work plan also.

And then lastly, we keep track of what is happening to other water utilities, other utilities out in the world, and just to understand what could happen to us. Just because it hasn't happened to us before, it doesn't mean it won't, so we need to learn from others as well. And two that aren't on the top of our mind would be the May 7th, 2021 American oil pipeline system which suffered a ransomware attack that day. It impacted their computerized system that operates the pipeline. And so, Colonial Pipeline had to pay a ransom right away. I don't know if it was in the first hour, but certainly within the first couple of hours, and the FBI supported that decision.

So, then the bad actor gave them the software application to give them access back to their operating systems, so they were able to do that. But it was very pleasant for them, even with a software app to reverse the block that the bad actors put on it, the recovery wasn't easy or quick. So, there was that certainly, that I think the whole world is learning from. But also, in the water industry, one of the key events that happened this year, February 8th, 2021, the Oldsmar water utility in Florida, someone somehow remotely

accessed their computer system and briefly increased the amount of sodium hydroxide in the treatment system. And fortunately, a water supervisor, they saw it on their screen and was able to reverse it right away, but it was just another wake-up call, certainly for the water industry. So, with this information, we'd go forward and develop our plan for updating the Business Continuity Program.

Stephen: Kate, if I could interrupt you for a minute. This Steve. On that SCADA system that got hacked, I think RWA's is isolated, correct?

Kate: Yes, that's correct. Yeah.

Stephen: Now, was theirs more vulnerable somehow?

Kate: Yeah. It was more vulnerable.

Amanda: They were using a TeamViewer application which allows remote access into their SCADA system.

Stephen: Okay. Thank you.

Amanda: Which is how they were able to access their vulnerability.

Kate: Yeah. The Regional Water Authority system is much more secured compared to the Oldsmar one. All right. Any other questions before I go on? So, I just wanted to let you know how we're approaching this, and certainly, how others are approaching it, because, this is a standard practice, which is to look at the emergency preparedness cycle and all of our activities regarding planning and risk assessments in this particular way, as a cycle. So, the benefit of using this cycle is that it benefits our performance during real emergencies. That's the whole point of it. So, that when something happens, that we're able to continue the mission of Regional Water Authority, minimizing the disruption, interruptions as much as possible, respond in an organized, controlled way, and recover as quickly as we can. Certainly, all of that depends on what the situation is [inaudible] continuing to just increase our odds through this program.

And the first step would be to assess risk and to plan for what can go wrong. The next part of that is to make sure that we're equipped with what we need so we can implement response plans, and also implement risk mitigation activities to prevent negative consequences from occurring, as much as we can, as much as reasonable. And then the next part would be to train staff and test our plans, exercise our plans, like our recent tabletop exercise that Stephen mentioned. And then the last part of this cycle is just to evaluate our performance. How well did we do in those exercises? What went right in recent real events, and what could we have done better so that this is a continual improvement process? So, the way we have our program set up is that we have a number of opportunities to identify continual improvement actions. And continual improvement for when something goes wrong, so when there's an

emergency, when there's a severe weather event, when there's an equipment malfunction, et cetera.

So, obviously, the top way would be when real events happen, and we learned from that experience. But outside of real events occurring, there's other ways we can identify opportunities to improve. One is through the risk assessments. That identifies our top risks and what our vulnerabilities are. And then as a group, and this isn't just a couple of people at Regional Water, we get feedback across the departments; what can we do to mitigate risk and to be more prepared? So, that's one way. Another way is to review our emergency response plans, also, those emergency exercises are helpful. So, all of those activities get used and leveraged to identify continual improvement actions, and we manage those and track them, and document them. All right. Does anyone have questions on that?

All right, good. Moving along then. So, I've got a brief on two of our recent tabletop exercises. We also had another one. I'm sorry, I didn't include that, but we did do a ransomware exercise, May 21st, so that was just a couple of weeks after the American oil pipeline event. We had 23 staff, it was over Zoom. We tested Regional Water's incident management plan, the information security incident response plan, and business continuity plan. And then the key improvement actions that came out of that were... And there were others, but these were the key ones; is to revisit loss of the SAP system during the next business continuity planning update, which we just started. To analyze the IBM contract with respect to emergency events. So, that's the network backup system. And then to continue staff training and exercises, but also with some specific keys as to how we should proceed with that. I'll get into that a little bit more later.

Amanda: Kate, before we move on, one of the big things here that was very interesting is that we were using a hosted system as our basis of our exercise, which is... One of the new norms within our IT, which Prem, I'm sure, can speak to more than me, but with hosted systems, we have certain requirements within the contract that the host is responsible for on their cyber security side, as well as, we have cyber insurance on the RWA side, which will kick in and help us with our customers and our customer data. So, there's a blend within the contract where the vendor and RWA will both be responding. So, we use this as an opportunity to really dive into our contracts, especially in the hosted environments, to make sure that we have as much cyber coverage as we could possibly get.

Kate: That's good. Yeah. And I should add, not every water utility has cyber coverage right now. A lot of utilities are still trying to figure it out. And Regional Water is figuring it out and is ahead of the game, I would say. But certainly, all water utilities need to go down this path. All right. And then next would be the Spring Street pump station exercise which occurred on June 7th. We had 30 staff over Zoom, and we tested the incident management plan, the critical component failure plan, as well as water restriction procedures. The key actions that came out of that were to have specifically, planning discussions around various what-if scenarios with Connecticut Department of Public

Health, to find out what their expectations would be, which are not always spelled out, particularly when you haven't been through a particular kind of emergency before. It just hasn't happened before. We've been lucky.

Not that we expect it to happen, but it could happen, and we want to know what Connecticut DPH would expect from us, and how they would want the response to go. So, that will help us in our planning too, because they're our partner. And then next, to update plans, also to develop a procedure to provide alternate water per the new Connecticut regulation, which requires that if Regional Water Authority cannot provide water to customers within an eight-hour period, if it's going to take longer than, I believe, eight hours-

Amanda: I think it's actually 12.

Kate: Is it 12?

Amanda: It's 12, I believe.

Kate: I keep on mixing it up. If it takes-

Amanda: It's so new. We're still wrapping our brains around it.

Kate: Yes. Thanks, Amanda. So, if we can't provide water to customers, and it's going to take longer than 12 hours, we have to have a plan for how to get water to them; bottled water, setting up water filling stations, whatever it is. And we're currently working on that plan. We have a meeting scheduled, I believe, next week to continue working on that plan, which is under development. And then-

Amanda: And Kate, just to jump in there really quickly, the other item that we've done as well, is we've already started vendor setups with folks that we can get potable drinking water tankers from. So, actually, as part of the procurement updates to their planning, they're adding new vendors into their listing as well, which will fit into the plan and the procedure that we developed, but we've already identified key vendors to help us meet this Connecticut regulation. And it's just a matter of getting the standard operating procedure in place for that.

Kate: That's right. And we're working on multiple ways to get water to them. One is through those water tankers, but then there's a lot of other things to do also. And that's why a team is working on this. Certainly, looking at the interconnections that Regional Water has with other water utilities is another way. Yeah. So, that plan is under development right now. And then also, I mean, I don't think we've ever had an emergency exercise where staff training and future exercises hasn't been identified as an action item, because, these exercises and real events that we experienced, really inform what we need to test next.

Amanda: So, just to speak briefly about the training, I know we'll get into it further, but RWA follows an instant command system. It's very standard across multiple first responders. So, it helps RWA stay in touch with our local Connecticut DPH, with firefighters, with police officers. So, at any point in time where we're in an emergency situation, we speak the same language and we have the same command structure set up, so that way, we can easily follow suit with other emergency responders. It's been very helpful. We've put multiple staff members through advanced training, where we did in-person classes, which involved about seven or eight RWA staff throughout key positions within the company. So that way, we have multiple people who can step into a role as expert incident commanders. And then we continue to do more ICS training at all staff levels, especially with new hires and newly promoted staff members who may now have a new requirement as a potential incident commander.

Kate: That's right. Yes. And we also have some seasoned incident commanders on staff that can also model others how to fulfill that role too. Okay. Anyone have questions about that? I guess we didn't talk about our most recent exercise.

Amanda: We just wrapped up our after-action report, which is why you're not seeing it on this presentation. It is still very, very new, but last month, we had a loss of our North Cheshire Wellfield due to a contamination event. Again, we had a little under 30 staff members involved, and it was related to a PFAS contamination. We had multiple members of the Connecticut DPH, as well as consultants that are experts in PFAS in the Massachusetts area, who have dealt with it in other water systems, attend our exercise. It was very well done. We had breakout sessions, our leadership operated the emergency operations center, just due to the level of the exercise. And it was very well done, so we look forward to more events like that. Stephen was able to join us. So, Stephen, do you have any comments about the exercise? He's still there? On mute.

Kate: So, we did identify some specific training and exercises that came out of that, to do. And one is to practice or to receive some more training on how to interface between Regional Water Authority's emergency operations center and the ICS system, the responders themselves. So, we just need a little more training and practice on that. And then other action items that came out of that; we're planning around water contamination. PFAS is new. It's new on the scene, it's not something that Regional Water Authority sees, in action levels, in our source water. So, it's not something that we've had to be concerned about, but because it is a new chemical, and it's possible that, at some point in the future, we may need to respond to PFAS in our water. It's possible, that, or something else, that we have some more planning to do around that, and also some more scripts to write for public information.

Amanda: And Kate, before we move on, just quick update for everybody here. Our next step in our work plan is we're going to be doing an exercise related to the Lake Gaillard water treatment plant. That's on this slide. I forgot about that.

Kate: Yeah. That's right.

Amanda: So, let's move on [crosstalk].

Kate: Yeah. I know. That brings us right to this slide. So, that's our next emergency exercise plan. And I'm looking at the third column over now. Let's start there. So, certainly, incident management and response training, we're going to continue what we've been doing, but also brainstorm; is there other ways that we can do this better? What are we missing? Let's fill in the gaps. So, there's that. Spring Street pump station exercise, we did, North Cheshire and then the Lake Gaillard, that's right.

So, that brings you up to speed on the exercises. So, now. Going all the way to the left, we have some American Water Infrastructure Act, that's AWIA, the acronym, and follow-up activities. And one is developing our SCADA response plan, which is in draft form. We're just finalizing that now. And then also, specifically, to update the business continuity plan in certain ways, to mitigate the risks that we know we need to work on now. As well as some disaster recovery planning around the laboratory and the SCADA system, and some other areas.

So, the next bullet, we are working on our water quality emergency response plan. And this is planned specifically for water quality emergencies. So, anything from a discolored water to a serious chemical. What if there was a serious chemical in our water? So, how would we respond? So, it brings us through how do we detect it, how do we communicate about it, how do we respond as quickly as we can, and how do we recover? So, that's some follow up-

Amanda: Kate, just to point into that, so our water quality emergency response plan is still in its draft form, but was used at the North Cheshire Wellfield tabletop exercise. So, we were able to actively test it while in drafts. So, we have a really great standing for that plan, to finalize that shortly.

Kate: That's right. Yeah. Okay. Good. Next, business continuity plan updates. That is just starting right now. Each department at Regional Water Authority has their own business continuity plan, plus we have an overarching business continuity plan for the whole organization. So it's like this system of plans, and it's really the underpinning for all of our emergency response plans. So, these department plans are being updated now, and the way we do that is we do this mini risk assessment for each department, like what could go wrong, what are our countermeasures to prevent losses, what are our response plans, what resources do we need, all of that. So, it's like a mini risk assessment. And then based on the results of that, we have a business continuity plan for each department. We have about 25 departments plans and then that overarching plan. So, we just began that update process, or we're meeting with each of the departments to get their feedback and talk about how their plan needs to be updated. And we're going to finish that this fiscal year.

Amanda: So, for everyone on this call, we do this every two years in a formal process. And then each department-specific plan, the department leaders for that area will update their plans as changes happen; we have some staff turnover, or if we have a new system or

new vendors that we're using. So, those get updated periodically throughout the two years, but we do a formal process and check-in with Kate and myself, on every single plan. And so obviously, from 2019, so now, 2021 is our next formal.

Kate: That's right. Okay, good. And then the last part of our work plan is program management. How do we just keep this program fresh and useful for everyone, and help it make sure that staff can perform during emergencies in a confident, resilient way? So, there are a couple of ways we do that. One is that we have a business continuity committee, and they meet a couple of times a year, and that provides an oversight committee about all of our activities. And then we also have a smaller core group out of that committee, and we call that the training and exercise team. So, that team tracks our continual improvement action items. They also track our training and exercises, and help put together the plan for what exercises should we be doing year to year and what training should we be focusing on from year to year. Yeah. So, that system, along with Amanda and I steering it, we manage plan updates and risk assessments and those continual improvement actions.

Amanda: Absolutely. And obviously, you can see as Kate had put in here, there's quite a few Zooms. So, this full program management pivoted, much like everything else, through the pandemic, and we have not missed a beat in any of our program management. It was a new undertaking to get some of these larger meetings done via Zoom, but we've managed it, we've managed it well, and I'm happy that the Business Continuity Program has continued on very strongly throughout the pandemic.

Kate: Yeah. And I just want to add to that. The business continuity committee, it's about 20-something people. We meet twice a year. The training and exercise team is about a dozen of us, and we meet approximately four times a year. Just to give you a sense of the level of effort that that takes. So, our training objectives are really focused on, like Amanda said, incident management; how do we manage incidents in a coordinated way? What we learned from exercises and real events is that there's a lot of great teamwork at Regional Water. And this is true for any of us. When we are faced with something we've never experienced before, like an emergency, unplanned or unexpected, just crops up, we need to coordinate in new ways and we need to team up in new ways. So, the incident management system helps us do that better.

Yeah. And then the other piece of it is just to practice our response roles. Since we're used to normal operations, we don't always exercise emergency operations because that's just not what happens day-to-day, fortunately. But when it does, we want those response activities we're expecting staff to take, to be practiced, and for them to have some familiarity with how to respond. So, we try to put them, through these exercises, into situations where they have to think outside of the box, think outside of day-to-day, and just put the puzzle pieces together to create a response.

Amanda: Yeah. And most of our staff has taken the incident command system. It's actually called ICS 100. It's sponsored by FEMA. However, we've done classes before at RWA. Most of our newer staff has taken it as an online class. And now, for the roles and expectations,

we're starting to look at how do we do some real-life activity training, much like the seven or eight of us that went through the incident command in-person classes, how do we get that into our 100 and 200 level employees, so that way they can really dive into the roles?

Kate: Right. And that's how we prepare for any hazard, all emergencies. One way we prepare for specific hazards is by having... Say it's a water quality emergency, for example, to have those staff become familiar with their response plan, give us input about their plan, and have a workgroup when they update the plan. I mean, right now, we're creating a brand new water quality emergency response plan. So, to involve staff and get their input, and have that back and forth dialogue, is a form of training. It's on-the-job training that gives them familiarity with hazard-specific events, whether it's a flood or water quality emergency, or loss of a critical component failure. So, staff are actively working with these response procedures to update them, discuss them. So, that's part of the training too, even though that's more informal than the ICS which is a formal training.

Okay. Any questions thus far? I really think I just have one more thing to share. Just that our emergency exercise objectives are to cultivate a culture of emergency preparedness. Just like Regional Water Authority had to cultivate a culture of safety for a safe workplace, which has been ongoing for decades now, we've been cultivating an emergency preparedness culture too. So that's based on that cycle I shared on the first slide. And also, overall, just to develop more in-house incident commanders, staff, familiar with how to use the incident command system for any emergency, but also to know how to tap in and respond to specific events. And then lastly, just to continue testing to make sure people are well-practiced and ready. That's the whole point; to be ready for anything, testing plans, response roles, internal and external coordination. So those are the objectives of our exercise program. And that's all I had for the presentation. Welcome any questions anyone has.

Tony: I would tell you that this was very informative. And I hadn't heard some of these things before, so this is good stuff. Thank you.

Kate: Thanks, Tony.

Jennifer: Stephen. You're on mute.

Stephen: Sorry about that. I have a couple of questions out of just curiosity. The pandemic plan that RWA had, did it anticipate the amount of remote meetings and operation that we needed to have or was it mostly focused on people being out?

Kate: Well, before Coronavirus, the standard planning for us to do was to try to get drugs or pharmaceuticals, so it'd be like antibiotics or a vaccine, to staff as quickly as possible. So, that was the primary focus, as well as infection control at the workplace. As far as... Go ahead.

Amanda: I'll share a little bit about that. So, we had a stockpile of N95 fives on hand, as part of our pandemic planning, and this came out of the H1N1 swine flu pandemic. This was why we had all of this. We also had hand sanitizer and soap and other products that were in bulk order, for keeping [inaudible]. We had the plan in place, which was to make RWA a pod through the Department of Health, which would make us eligible for any measures that would allow us to help fight the pandemic, which we did in our COVID-19 response, where we were actively lobbying to get our vaccines within Phase 1B. And we wanted to make sure we stayed in Phase 1B before they did away with all of the phases and went strictly to an age realm.

So, those were the basis of our infectious disease plan. And fortunately, the H1N1 pandemic was not nearly as contagious as what we dealt with in COVID-19, but we were easily able to pivot from what we had in place. And actually, we had an incident command system set up. Ted Norris was actually our leader at the time, during that, when we pulled that plan, that within Jeanine and Prem, you might be able to speak better. Six days, five days, we had a fully up-to-date plan ready to go to deal with everything that was being thrown at us.

Jeanine: Yes. We had a small team of people that really had to look at every component of what we did. And to answer you more directly, Steve, I don't think in our wildest dreams, we could have anticipated that it would last as long as it did, and we had to be remote and virtual, and many of the things that we did. I don't think anybody had a clue, but we were really set up quite effectively for that. I'm proud of the work that Prem and his team did, because, before that day in March, we really didn't have much ability to work from home, and Prem and his small army of IT professionals had to get us all up and running. So, a lot of work went into it.

Stephen: Yeah, I'm sure. And you did a great job considering a challenge that was facing you before. Amanda, what is the current sort of obligation to Gradient Planning, and having Kate help you with this ongoing here?

Amanda: So, Kate works through PSA with RWA on a yearly basis. Each year, we set up a work plan for our BCP program coordination, and she helps us with all of our plans, our testing, and helping us run all of our committees to make sure that RWA meets our emergency preparedness goals.

Stephen: Okay. And lastly, is that Lake Chamberlain in your background?

Amanda: It is. Yes.

Stephen: One of my favorite places. I was there yesterday for a hike.

Amanda: Yeah. I have to admit, I cannot take photo credit though. This is from [inaudible]. I loved it so much, I stole it as my Zoom background.

- Stephen: Very good. Any other questions from committee members or anyone else? Very comprehensive, nice presentation. We really appreciate you coming today. Thank you both very much.
- Kate: You're welcome. Thank you for having us.
- Stephen: Sure. Appreciate it. Item four on our agenda is our consumer affairs report. Jeff.
- Jeff: Good afternoon. Still pretty quiet in terms of no complaints for many consumers. Obviously, the big item that I worked on last month was the issuance test rate application, a memorandum to the RPB, and the testimony. The RPB. I also was invited to participate, on October 7th, in a presentation that the authority made to its employees, of the rate application. Rochelle Kowalski basically repeated the presentation that she made to the RPB, to I guess there were 50 to 60 employees or so, that were, via Zoom, participating in that.
- And I was asked by Larry and Rochelle to provide a historical perspective from the consumer perspective, really as it pertains to issuance test rate applications, the role that they play in financing the authorities, capital program, and my thoughts as to the authorities' evolution in terms of the initial reliance upon the issuance of debt, back in 1977, 1980 timeframe when the authority was organized, as well as the last 10 years or so, with respect to changes that have been made, in order to internally generate cash, and the importance of that, and to offer just a consumer perspective as to the role that the rate application plays and the financial picture for the authority. So, that was on October 7th. Other than that, nothing going on at the OCA level.
- Stephen: Okay, great. Thank you, Jeff. Our next item is approval of Jeff's invoice for September; 3250. Do I have a motion?
- Frank: I make a motion.
- Tony: I would move that.
- Yeah. [inaudible].
- Stephen: Okay. Tony and Frank, thank you.
- Tony: I'll second it, whatever.
- Stephen: Any questions for Jeff on the bill? All those in favor of approval.
- Tony: Aye.
- Stephen: Aye.
- Naomi: Aye.

Representative Policy Board
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Frank: Aye.

Stephen: Any opposed? Any abstentions? So, the OCA invoice is approved unanimously. Our next meeting is going to be November 15th, and I'm not aware of any new business. Does anyone have anything? Okay. I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

Rich: I move.

Frank: Move to adjourn.

Stephen: Thank you, Rich and Frank. All those in favor. Aye.

Group: Aye.

Stephen: Thanks, everybody.