



# The Technical Assistance Times

## NRWA Backs Emergency Assistance for Rural Water Systems Act

WASHINGTON, DC, August 4, 2020 - Congressmen David Rouzer of North Carolina (NC-07) and Filemón Vela Jr. of Texas (TX-34) introduced the Emergency Assistance for Rural Water Systems Act today.

The Emergency Assistance for Rural Water Systems Act allows USDA Rural Development to provide affordable and sustainable financial options for rural utilities impacted by COVID-19. **Assistance includes grants, zero percent loans, one percent loans, principal and interest reduction, loan modifications and direct operational assistance to provide financial stability for the impacted utility to get through this crisis.**

NRWA strongly supports these tools for Rural Development to employ in this crisis. NRWA's 30,000 member utilities need these tools and resources to directly address the financial concerns and continuity of operations challenges that the rural utilities are currently experiencing, especially as they continue to provide uninterrupted essential services now and in future disasters or economic downturns.

"Access to clean drinking water and safe wastewater treatment is vital every American, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic," stated Kent Watson, NRWA President and Texas National Director. "Serving as a manager of a rural utility for 30 years, I understand the necessity of the Emergency Assistance for Rural Utilities Act. This Act will provide assistance that is direly needed by many utilities in our Nation that are suffering the financial effects of the pandemic and will ensure future sustainability for these systems during times of crisis."

This legislation comes at a time that is desperately needed for Rural America and Rural Water. Small and rural communities have done their part to meet the public's needs during the COVID-19 pandemic by maintaining and restoring customer access to water services regardless of payment. NRWA estimates small water and wastewater systems stand to lose \$998 million in revenue due to customer nonpayment alone. This lost revenue will never be recovered by utilities and does not include emergency operational costs.

Most of the country's drinking water and wastewater utilities are small. Roughly 80 percent of the country's approximately 17,000 wastewater utilities serve populations less than 10,000 persons. Over 90 percent of the country's approximately 50,000 community water systems serve a populations less than 10,000 persons.

I'm proud to introduce this much-needed legislation to address our rural water infrastructure. Our rural communities have been struggling for years to maintain and update critical water infrastructure, a problem that has been made that much worse by revenue shortfalls due to the pandemic. "This legislation will provide critical resources to better ensure we have the sound water infrastructure necessary to providing basic services for rural families." Congressman David Rouzer.

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### MRWA Training Opportunities

Check out [www.mrwa.com](http://www.mrwa.com)

*Training Calendar link to check for upcoming MRWA in-person and online training opportunities.*



# League Continues to Recommend Avoiding Residential Water and Sewer Shut-Offs



July 20, 2020

The governor's emergency executive orders prohibiting evictions could be applied to shut-offs of essential services.

There have been lots of questions coming to League staff related to a city's ability to shut off water/sewer during the peacetime emergency.

The League's position is still that cities should not be shutting off residential water services for non-payment. Initially, Executive Order 20-14 was issued by Gov. Walz, preventing most evictions. That has now been mostly replaced by Executive Order 20-79, which continues that prohibition except in specific public health and safety situations or if the owner of the property intends to use the property as his or her primary residence.

Shut-off may equal 'constructive eviction'

The Minnesota attorney general has said that shutting off residential water service could be considered a "constructive eviction" because homes are not considered habitable if there is not running water. Related, as a normal rule of practice, cities should not shut off utilities at the request of a landlord when they know the residential property is being occupied.

The League has been communicating regularly with the Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) to ensure that our advice and positions are consistent. While aspects of the Minnesota Cold Weather Rule can apply to water utilities being disconnected, residents do not necessarily have to enter into payment plans to keep their utilities on during the peacetime emergency.

We suggest that cities work with their city attorneys on appropriate responses but consider using alternate approaches for collection of past-due accounts, such as voluntary payment plan arrangements or transmittal to the county for collection of unpaid balances through property tax collection.

*Reprinted from League of MN Cities, Cities Bulletin, July 20, 2020 <https://www.lmc.org>*

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## You Can Still Request Cloth Facemasks

In May, FEMA shipped 80,000 washable, reusable cloth facemasks to Minnesota for distribution to all Minnesota water and wastewater utilities that request them. To request masks, contact the Point of Distribution (POD) nearest you. Please visit mask information from MnWARN - [www.mnwarn.org](http://www.mnwarn.org) - to find the contact information for your closest POD and for additional details.

**If your system has already received masks, you can request more, especially if your staff are coming close to exceeding the 15 wash recommended limit.** All water/wastewater utilities are eligible; you do not have to be a Minnesota Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (MnWARN) member to receive masks.





# NATIONAL RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

NRWA™ *America's Largest Utility Membership*

## NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT

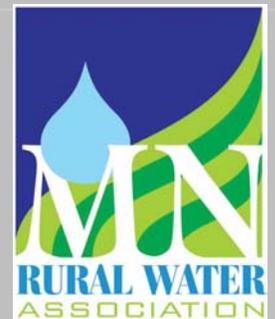
### Get Started on Your Water Utility Construction Project

Do you have a **Water Utility Construction Project**? Now is the time to act! Rates are at an all time low, and with the current pricing being opportunistic and taking action can result in benefits not only for your-self but for the customer as well. Consider the below items that detail positive reasons to act now that you can present to your governing body.

- Interest rates are at an all-time low.
- More project contractors are available, increasing the number of bids, potentially lowering project costs.
- Fuel costs are low, lowering pipe related costs.
- Most material costs for projects are down.
- Shipping costs for many have decreased.
- Road and water projects are easier to schedule due to decreased volume in traffic.
- Low construction costs and available contractors are not guaranteed to last.



USDA Rural Development is committed to helping improve the economy and quality of life in rural America. Offering loans, grants and loan guarantees are some of the ways Rural Development is supporting rural America.





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"I am proud to introduce bipartisan legislation that would provide much needed assistance to rural water and waste disposal systems affected by the novel coronavirus pandemic. This health crisis has showcased the important role safe drinking water and sanitary waste disposal play not only in public health, but also in the economic vitality of rural America. As we continue to fight this pandemic, we must ensure that our nation's rural water and waste disposal systems have resources and infrastructure needed to support families living in rural communities." Congressman Filemon Vela.

Rural America and State Rural Water Associations are proud of the commitment made by Congressmen Rouzer and Vela.

"Congressman David Rouzer (NC-7) has been a long-standing supporter of rural water utilities as far back as his days working at the USDA Rural Development and later the NC General Assembly. His determination to assist rural North Carolina and water and wastewater systems has never wavered and has once again been exhibited by his Emergency Assistance for Rural Water Systems Act. As a resident of Congressman Rouzer's district, I could not be more proud of his attentiveness to the needs of his district and the priorities of rural and eastern North Carolina," said Daniel Wilson, Executive Director of North Carolina Rural Water Association.

Brian Macmanus, Texas Rural Water Association's Immediate Past President, acknowledges Congressman Vela's vision. "Congressman Vela has always listened to the needs of his rural water constituents in District 34, and is aware of our systems' financial needs. On two occasions he has visited our local surface water treatment facilities. Here in Deep South Texas and across our entire state and country, we are very pleased with the potential relief this bill provides to our water and wastewater systems in Rural America."