



Implementation Guidance for Ohio Public Water Systems to Comply with Reconnection Requirements Under Ohio HB 197

On March 30, 2020, Ohio EPA issued Orders to regulated entities under Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 6109 and Amended Substitute House Bill 197 (eff. March 27, 2020, hereinafter referred to as HB 197). These orders remain in effect for the duration of the current State of Emergency declared by Executive Order 2020-01D, or Dec. 1, 2020, whichever occurs first. If the State of Emergency extends beyond Dec. 1, 2020, the Director may issue additional orders.

The purpose of this guidance is to assist Ohio Public Water Systems in compliance with Order No. 2 listed below:

- During the State of Emergency regarding COVID-19, a Public Water System shall not disconnect customers due to nonpayment of fees and/or charges.
- Upon request by a customer whose service was disconnected on or after Jan. 1, 2020, as a result of nonpayment of fees and/or charges, a Public Water System shall as expeditiously as possible, restore drinking water service to the customer. The Public Water System shall waive all fees for the reconnection of service and provide homeowners with guidance on procedures to ensure piping and fixtures are appropriately flushed before water is used for potable purposes. For purposes of this paragraph, the phrase “fees for the reconnection of service” is limited to actual reconnection costs but is not intended to prevent a Public Water System from sending a monthly bill to the homeowner based on actual water usage after reconnection.
- An order issued under HB 197 Section 8(A) is deemed an order issued under Chapter 6109 of the Revised Code. As such, the order may be enforced in the same manner as any other order issued under that chapter.

Public water systems are expected to reconnect customers as expeditiously as possible and if reconnection is not possible or if it is delayed due to any reason, they must maintain documentation.

Considerations for water service restoration include the following:

- Customers with water service that has been shut off since Jan. 1, 2020, must request reconnection to their water system. Shutoffs that occur prior to this date are not subject to this order.
- Water restorations should be evaluated on a case by case basis with the following considerations for safe drinking water and infrastructure protection, including the distribution system and staff safety:
 - Only required to restore service where nonpayment due to the lack of ability to pay was the issue.
 - The property must currently be occupied as a residential property or essential business.
 - If reconnection requires home or facility entry, water systems should take additional precautions to minimize risk to both the customer and the water system personnel and include the use of PPE.
 - The property owner must be present during turn-on, so that they can check for leaks and be given internal plumbing flushing instructions. Individuals who rent must work through the building property owner, or their representative.
 - If service is for a business or any homes with auxiliary water sources (e.g. on-site well), any backflow and potential contamination issues must be mitigated, and backflow devices must be tested prior to reconnection and in accordance with OAC Chapter 3745-95.

Additional Guidance

Ohio EPA has developed guidance for in-home and facility flushing titled *Guidance for Premise Plumbing Water Service Restoration*. This guidance includes a one-page summary *Flushing Your Home Plumbing When Water Service is Restored* and a door hanger template. These are available online at epa.ohio.gov/ddagw/covid19.

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- There are additional water quality considerations for residents following service restoration:
 - If the home/business contains a lead service line, water that has been stagnant would likely contain higher than normal lead levels.
 - Water that has been stagnant in a service line may contain particulate matter such as rust or other debris, that may clog up the water meter and other plumbing fixtures or appliances. This may necessitate indoor repair, which would be the responsibility of the homeowner, occupant or building owner.
 - Water stagnant in the plumbing may also contain elevated levels of bacteria, some of which may be harmful.
 - Proper flushing of both the hot and cold water by the customer will greatly reduce the water quality concerns listed above. If any plumbing modifications are needed, customers should follow state and local plumbing codes as well as the manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance on any appliances.

Contact

For more information, please visit the division's COVID-19 webpage - epa.ohio.gov/ddagw/covid19.