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Wolf Administration Provides Guidance for Buildings Closed During COVID-19

Harrisburg, PA – As businesses in counties enter the Yellow Phase of the state’s reopening plan, the Pennsylvania departments of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Health (DOH) are encouraging owners and operators of dormant buildings to flush building water systems prior to reopening. Buildings that have been closed or used less frequently for an extended period of time may experience problems with water quality due to stagnation.

“As buildings have been shut down or used less frequently as a result of COVID-19 mitigation efforts, building water quality degradation becomes a silent but serious issue,” said DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell. “Legionella, pathogens, lead, and disinfection byproducts can result when water sits for an extended period of time, which may lead to health issues.”

In the days leading up to reopening, the following recommendations and considerations should be made, and a team of facilities staff or a water management consultant will be needed to prepare the water system.

“As we carefully and intentionally determine which businesses are safe to reopen, we must also make sure they reopen in a manner that is protective of employees and customers,” said Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine.

Buildings that have been closed or used less frequently should consider the following measures:

- Develop a flushing plan
 - Identify where the water enters the building, all taps (faucets, shower heads, water fountains), and water-using devices (dishwashers, ice machines)
 - Remove any potential cross connections, such as hoses connected to spigots, to prevent backflow into plumbing systems
 - Remove aerators when possible
- Flush the entire building
 - Flush cold water lines before hot water lines
 - Flush the building zone by zone, beginning where the water enters the building and moving outward towards the distal ends
 - Flushing time will vary based on building size; a temperature change or chlorine smell may be used as indicators that fresh water has reached all fixtures within the building
- Clean faucets, shower heads, and other fixtures
- Inspect and conduct necessary maintenance on mechanical equipment such as water heaters, boilers, storage tanks, backflow prevention devices, etc. using manufacturer’s instructions
- Consider developing an ongoing water management plan to maintain high quality water at all times

For more information on building water systems and flushing, please visit the [CDC website](#).

For more information on COVID-19, please visit the PA Department of Health [website](#).