

Rachel Johnson (00:08):

[inaudible],

Rachel Johnson (00:09):

I'm Rachel Johnson, the member relations manager here at Cherryland electric cooperative. And we wanted to hop on a really brief podcast with you today to talk about a very timely issue and one that a lot of people are talking about right now. And that is the novel coronavirus, otherwise known as COVID 19, and specifically how utilities are planning to handle any impacts to our workforce or our community, um, from that virus. So I wanted to kind of start by talking about just best practices and how utilities are approaching this in general. The electricity sub sector coordinating council or EFCC, uh, just released a guide to help utilities plan for and respond to the COVID 19 pandemic. And what the EFCC is, it's a liaison between the federal government and the electric power industry that's made up of utility CEOs and they, uh, get together and their mission is to coordinate efforts to prepare for and respond to national level threats to critical infrastructure.

Rachel Johnson (01:06):

So they're recognizing that COVID 19 is a threat that needs to be prepared for and pushing out some best practices that utilities can use to make sure that we're fully prepared. And what I, I'll talk a little bit about what's in that report, but I want to make sure as you're listening to this, you know, the one thing that really struck me as I was looking through the report is that Cherryland's already doing all the things they're recommending. And so I was feeling very confident in our approach to, uh, being prepared for this particular pandemic. But ultimately the way they lay out their planning is, you know, we, we kind of went through a phase where we were assessing the situation and that involved continuing to monitor infection rates nationally at the state level. Certainly if you have any in your state. Um, and then in areas for us that might affect supply chain.

Rachel Johnson (01:51):

So our ability to get the materials that we need in order to serve our members. And we've been doing that for weeks now here at Cherryland and it kind of now moved on to what they say is the next phase, which is really your prep phase. So you may not have any confirmed cases, a Corona virus among your employees or within your service territory, which we do not here at Cherryland right now. But making sure that we take advantage of that time to really deeply assess our readiness. And I'll talk a little bit about some of those assessments that we've done and some of those plans that we have. The goal being that if we do the prep phase right, we're then ready to move into either mitigation or response. So let's say we had confirmed cases in our service territory, still maybe none at Cherryland.

Rachel Johnson (02:35):

Are we ready to implement measures to protect our employees? If we had confirmed cases amongst our employees, are we prepared to still be able to manage all of our critical business functions for our members, even if some of our workforce isn't available to us because they're ill? So in this prep phase, which is the piece I wanted to really focus on for the podcast today because I think it's important that our listeners and our community are aware of what we've done and what we're for and our prep pays. Our senior team has met regularly to assess the situation and our readiness. And we've already instituted several, uh, preventative measures here, right at Cherryland. So the most obvious one, a lot of organizations are doing this. We've increased our hygiene measures and I always, whenever people say this, I'm like, no, we were already washing our hands.

Rachel Johnson ([03:19](#)):

So it's not that, but it's more things like, uh, we have, we're keeping all the doors open throughout the entire building so that no one has to, except for the bathrooms so that no one has to actually touch door handles. We are, um, have hand sanitizer everywhere, so much hand sanitizer in every vehicle and in most offices. Um, those kinds of things. Just making sure that we're being super diligent with keeping our employees as sanitized as possible. The other thing we've done on the preventative side is work with our cleaning service. On more advanced Santa's taxation measures. Um, they have a lot of capabilities that we've not needed in the past that were, we're now going to be implementing here inside our office to make sure that if there were to be any infectious disease in our office we can get it sanitized quickly and make the space safe again.

Rachel Johnson ([04:12](#)):

At the same time we are preparing for that mitigation and response phase. I talked about from the EFCC report in particular, we are assessing our work from home readiness so all of our employees are assessing the extent to which they could fully do their job right now without having to come into the office identifying if they have maybe any, um, equipment needs that would keep them from doing that. We're getting that equipment ready to go and in their hands so that they could work from home and also assessing if they have any connectivity issues that would prevent them from doing their jobs. And what I want all of our, our members to know is that the results of that are very promising already. Our member services call center is completely prepared to handle all call volume from home. So we have things like that already in place and most of our operations and dispatch personnel are also already set up to completely do that work from home.

Rachel Johnson ([05:07](#)):

Um, it may not be obvious to you, but I bet it is. If you think hard about it, uh, it's a little harder when you talk about field employees, so the people who are out in the field, you know, fixing things when they go wrong. So we've started not started to, we have a plan in place now to social distance field employees, so they might take, say, a Cherryland vehicle home with them so they wouldn't have to come into the office, deploy directly to a work site if they need to, never have more than one employee in a vehicle. Those kinds of things to make sure that our critical field employees are safe and healthy and available when we need them to help get the power back on if something were to happen. The other thing that we're, we're still watching and kind of is a part of this, uh, prepping for mitigation and response phase is employee travel.

Rachel Johnson ([05:56](#)):

Uh, we are asking employees to keep us informed of places they're traveling so that we can make sure that we're, um, you know, responding to if we have an employee that's traveled somewhere, there's a high risk. Um, but we're also assessing the need to potentially cancel future business related travel. We don't have any real business related travel over the next couple of weeks that hasn't had to, we haven't had to put a full band in effect, but that is definitely something that we're going to watch and continue to respond to. And then finally, uh, we're assessing our stockpile of critical materials to ensure continuity of operations. And that goes back to that, um, kind of paying attention to our supply chain. And the good news is we have plenty of equipment onsite here at our office to handle anything that we might encounter over the next, um, several weeks or months.

Rachel Johnson ([06:41](#)):

And so we feel very confident. We have the supplies we need, we're doing everything we need to, um, protect our employees and keep them healthy and also have available that workforce. We will need to keep our lights on for our members. And so I think that the takeaway and what I hope our listeners leave this podcast with is that we're taking this very seriously. We are constantly monitoring the situation. We're planning and assessing, and we understand how important the service we provide to this community is. But we're also fully confident at this point in our ability.

Rachel Johnson ([07:11](#)):

You serve the energy needs of our community. [inaudible].