



WATER & SEWER RISK MANAGEMENT POOL



Meter Reader Safety

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The following safety related program is for informational purposes only. The SORT committee hopes that each participating district will look at this program and discuss how it compares to the district's own practices. This program is NOT a complete safety program, but intended as guidelines. There is no guarantee that following a given program will eliminate or substantially reduce the risk of claim or injuries. It is expected that member districts will consider this program and adapt or modify it to fit the district's particular needs or circumstances.

METER READER SAFETY

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METER READER SAFETY

PURPOSE / SCOPE

The Water District cares about you, your health and your well-being. We want to ensure you that you have a safe, accident free and healthful working environment. You and your supervisor are the key to our Accident Prevention and Safety Program. You and your supervisor have the greatest control over whether or not safety equipment is used and safety precautions are followed, and potentially hazardous situations on the job are reported and corrected.

This Meter Reader Safety Program is designed to help serve our safety objectives. Please take the opportunity to read this program and assist in developing procedures as necessary. Please review it regularly to keep the information fresh in your mind. If you have any questions, talk to your supervisor or your safety officer.

Remember – you are the District’s most important resource, and safety on the job is one of our most important concerns.

Policy Statement

It shall be the policy of the Water District to require all employees who are classified as meter readers, filling in for a meter reader, and/or operating the District’s meter reading vehicles to rigidly follow the procedures set forth herein. It is the District’s responsibility to provide the employees with all safety devices or means that may be necessary or required for any particular use, operations set-up, or service.

This program was designed to work in conjunction with the operator’s manual specific with the District’s Meter Reading Vehicles and ensure the safety of the employees and the public. It is a District Policy that everyone will practice safety in or around the workplace. If at any time the safety of individuals, property, and/or equipment is in danger, operation will cease and corrective action will be taken. Improper operation of the District’s meter reading vehicles can cause injury or death.

It is the policy of the Water District that Meter Readers wear seat belts at all times while operating district vehicles. WAC 204-41-060 (the state's Utility Meter Reader law) does allow a variance to wearing seatbelts. Drivers are not required to wear seat belts while operating a vehicle in "residential areas" when the operator is continually in and out of the vehicle. Seat belts are required at all other times. Consult your supervisor for clarification on when this exemption to wearing seat belts applies.

EXEMPTIONS / EXCLUSIONS

WAC-204-41-060- METER READERS MAY BE EXEMPTED FROM THE SEAT BELT REQUIREMENTS ONLY DURING THE TIME THEY ARE READING METERS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS AND ARE CONTINUALLY IN AND OUT OF THEIR VEHICLES. SEAT BELT USE IS REQUIRED WHEN TRAVELING TO AND FROM THEIR ACTUAL ROUTE OR WHEN ON OTHER UTILITY BUSINESS.

HAZARD ANALYSIS

Duties are performed primarily in the field while driving an assigned vehicle or walking to read meters. When in the field, the employee may be subject to adverse weather conditions, automobile traffic, hostile animals, and angry customers. Duties require the physical ability to read and repair meters and perform physical work. Employees in this classification may also be required to crawl, kneel, climb and enter confined spaces in order to read meters. The employee also needs to ensure they are following all traffic laws during operation of the assigned vehicle at all times.

Hazard Description

Vehicle Safety Inspections

Meter Reader vehicles are subject to the same requirements as all other district vehicles. Meter Reader vehicles should be inspected for defective equipment and emergency equipment. Inspection guidelines and the inspection checklist are located in the district's Vehicle Fleet Safety Program.

Safety Equipment and Procedures

As set forth in the Policy Statement, "It is the District's responsibility to provide the employee with all safety devices or means that may be necessary or required for any particular use, operations set-up, or service".

Hazard Evaluation

Angry Customers

Of all the field employees at the District, the meter reader has the most exposure and the most contact with the general public. The nature of the job dictates that they talk with customers on a daily basis. The meter reader responds to customer inquiries, problems, and complaints related to metering by working with the customer. Most customers are pleasant; however, you will encounter the occasional angry customer.

Hostile Animals

One of the greatest hazards facing meter readers is dealing with hostile animals. There can be many types of animals encountered; however, the one that poses the largest threat and the first one that comes to mind are dogs. This section will deal primarily with dogs.

ENTERING THE CUSTOMER'S PREMISES:

Meter readers have the legal right to enter a property, or pass through a fence-line when reading meters. However; liability could be incurred by the district if reader conduct violates state or federal laws. Care should be exercised both; not to cause property damage and when dealing with animals. One method of prevention districts should consider is imprinting the route read date(s) on customer's bills so that dogs can be kept in the house during those dates.

Staff training should include: policies when workers notice, "Beware of Dog" signs out in the field.

Meter Reader Safety

If you suspect there may be an aggressive dog at an account to be read, or there is a history of a dog at the residence (the District's Meter Reading Terminal can "flag" the account with specific notes), before entering the premises you may wish to do the following:

- Phone the owner. Ask them if the dog is there, where it is, and what the dog's temperament is. Have the dog put inside if possible.
- If you cannot reach the customer by phone, whistle or call for the dog. Be sure you are loud enough to be heard.
- If you enter a yard when a resident is not home, and are unsure if they have an animal, look for signs of a dog, doghouse, rope/chain, droppings, scratches on a door, or warning signs. If a dog appears, try to determine what sort of temperament it has.
- Aggressive dogs: flag meter for a re-read. Then have office make arrangements with the customer to secure the dog prior to the re-read.

The following information given can be used with other animals as well. Due to the nature of meter reading the employee is constantly going on the customer's property. Take steps to protect yourself before entering the premises and while working there. Remember – due to liability reasons, it is against District policy to use mace, pepper spray, or other chemical repellents.

Methods of Evaluation

Complacency around dogs is dangerous. Many employees are bitten because they don't pay attention. Dogs should never be allowed to get behind the meter reader. Even the most submissive dog, if scared, will nip at the unsuspecting employee from behind. Always keep the dog in front of you where you can see the animal.

APPROACHING A STRANGE DOG

Observe the dog's body language.

Aggressive stance – the hair on the back or near the tail is raised, tail is held high and wagged stiffly, and teeth may be bared. It is best to slowly back away and not attempt to read the meter. Signs of friendliness – tail in a horizontal position or wagging in broad sweeps. Timid dogs – timid dogs will hold its tail down, sometimes between its back legs. The dog may approach in a semi-crouch. **Do not** make any sudden moves around a timid dog. Speak in a quiet, calm manner and let the dog come to you. Extend the back of your hand to the dog. This is a sign of friendliness.

Be extremely careful around a dog that is tied or chained.

As a general rule, a restricted dog is an aggressive dog. Most dogs are loyal and protective, if they feel their territory or owners are threatened, they can become very aggressive. Remember - when speaking with customers keep your distance and watch your tone of voice. A loud or harsh voice toward the owner can be considered a threat by the dog. Exercise extreme caution when approaching a dog that is eating, playing with children, or caring for puppies.

If you are confronted or attacked

Always carry something to use as protection. Use whatever means necessary for self-protection such as meter stick, flashlight (ANSI approved steel-toed boots!). However, if you have nothing to put between you and the dog, remember the following steps:

- Stop.
- Do not scream.
- Say "No!" in a deep, firm voice. If the dog stops, tell it to "Go home!"
- Keep a side posture in relation to the animal.
- Slowly put your hands up around your neck.
- Keep your elbows close to your body.
- Avoid direct eye contact in some cases. Always be aware of the dog's location.
- Wait until the dog leaves before you move away.
- If the dog attacks, be sure **YOU** pick where it will bite. If possible try to knee or kick the dog in a vulnerable area (nose, throat, rib cage).
- Never turn your back and run from a dog.

Be alert and observant

Try to determine the demeanor of the dog confronting you and act accordingly. If you are uncomfortable with the situation avoid it and call for assistance. If you are bitten, seek medical attention and report the injury to your supervisor. Get as much information on the dog as possible (i.e. shot history, etc.). If you injure a customer's animal, report it to your supervisor.

DEALING WITH INSECTS, RODENTS, OR OTHER PESTS

Please refer to the "Poisoning Program" " for more information.

Other field hazards the meter reader faces are insects and rodents (bees, wasps, hornets, spiders, snakes, etc.). Especially in the spring, you must be aware of the painful and sometimes fatal hazard insects and rodents represent. Nests can be found in trees, shrubbery, and inside meter boxes. If you encounter a nest do the following:

- Move away quickly.
- If you choose to spray the nest, be sure to follow all written instructions.
***Prior to using the spray refer to the M.S.D.S. and read it carefully.
The user assumes all risks of use. ***
- After you have sprayed the nest, leave and allow time for the spray to work.
- Return later to obtain the read.

Exposure Determination

Meter Readers and field crew members are exposed to the dangers of angry customers, hostile animals and insects and rodents.

RESPONSIBILITIES

District- Provide the meter reader with all the proper PPE to meter read.

Designated Person or Safety Program Coordinator- Implement the safety training and enforce the safety regulations of the district. Also ensuring that the meter reader's safety gear is up to date and that the meter reader has the proper equipment.

Managers- Handle issues with customers that arise and make sure that the meter reader has the proper training to complete the tasks.

Employees- Familiarize with the safe and correct ways to operate the assigned vehicle. Also observe and follow all pertinent laws and regulations of the state.

GUIDELINES/RULES

Applicable SOPs

SAFETY WHILE READING METERS:

1. Avoid jumping ditches.
2. Go around fences and/or through gates. Avoid climbing the fence whenever possible.
3. Be sure of your footing when stepping over obstacles and watch for slippery surfaces.
4. When getting the read bend at the knees, not at the waist. Keep your back as straight as possible.
5. Avoid twisting at the waist. Step toward the direction you wish to go.
6. **At the meter box:** Lift the inspection plate to obtain the read. If you must remove the meter box lid, get a firm grip on the far side of the lid and carefully roll it toward you. If you are at an account with a large lid, or the meter is in a vault and you need help, call for assistance.
7. If a vehicle is parked over a meter, leave a notice to move the vehicle, flag it in your report, and return later. **It is the Districts policy that you do not crawl under the vehicle to obtain the read.**
8. Be aware of your surroundings. Keep your eyes and ears open.
9. Don't rush. Going too fast increases the risk of accident and/or injury to you or others around you.

SAFE DRIVING PROCEDURES WHILE READING THE ROUTE

It is the responsibility of the meter reader to ensure public safety during the operation of assigned vehicle by operating vehicle according to all speed and traffic regulations. The District utilizes right-hand drive vehicles for reading meters. While in transit to your area of work, all normal traffic regulations apply. Once you arrive at the first account find a safe place to pull over. Put vehicle in park, set the emergency brake and turn on the 4-way flashers and/or rotary beacon. **Always wear your safety vest and high visibility rain gear, depending on the weather.**

The use of your headlights is always recommended to make yourself more visible to others. Before exiting your vehicle do the following:

- Make sure vehicle is in park and parking brake is set.
- Check all mirrors (especially on your right to see if there is any foot/bicycle traffic, etc.).
- Check ground for footing.

Once you have recorded the reading, return to the vehicle and do the following:

- Apply foot brake.
- Release parking brake.
- Put transmission in "Drive".
- Check all mirrors for traffic/obstructions.
- Merge onto road when clear.
- Proceed to the next account.
- Bring vehicle to a complete stop.
- Put transmission in "Park".
- Set parking brake.
- Check mirrors exit vehicle and record reading.
- Repeat this procedure as you complete your route.

When you finish your assigned reading do the following:

- Turn off the rotary warning beacon and the 4-way flashers.
- Close and secure the driver's door.
- Fasten seat belt and proceed to the next assignment.

Within the boundaries of the District there are many different areas that you will be reading. These areas include rural widespread accounts, densely populated housing developments, business districts, industrial parks, etc. Each of these areas has their own unique circumstances that the meter reader needs to be aware of. Safe driving procedures begin with being alert to the situations around you.

Required PPE

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- **Rubber Boots:** Steel toe, ANSI #Z41 PT 91 M/75 C/75
- **Rain Gear:** 1-coat, 1-pair pants
- **Safety Vest:** To be used at all times
- **Hard Hat:** 6-point, ratcheting adjustable headband, ANSI #Z89.1 1997, Type 1, Class E

Meter Reader Safety

- **Safety Toed Footwear:** The District will provide an annual purchase of one pair of protective footwear that meets WAC 296-155-212 and ANSI Z41.1.1967 standards.
- **District Provided Clothing:** Supervisor will advise

Also available on an as needed basis:

- Rubber coated work gloves
- Latex gloves
- Winter hardhat liner
- Safety glasses/goggles

MISCELLANEOUS SAFETY EQUIPMENT

- First Aid Kit
- High Visibility traffic cones
- Bee and Wasp Spray
- Fire Extinguisher
- Flares

Prevention Actions-

The following is a list of ideas that could ease a potentially bad situation:

- When approached or approaching a customer, keep a comfortable distance between you and the customer.
- Be courteous, professional and pleasant.
- Listen to the customer; let them talk.
- Look for signs that the customer is becoming more or less angry.
- Remain calm no matter what the customer says to you.
- Do not say anything that could escalate the situation.
- If all else fails, provide the customer with the supervisor's name and **work phone number**.
- If it appears the customer is becoming aggressive or may harm you, carefully remove yourself from the situation and report it to your supervisor.
- Avoid phone or radio conversations that could create customer hostility.
- **Under No circumstances will the meter reader enter a customer's residence.**

Remember – you are there to read the meter and help the customer. If you are not comfortable with the situation, leave and tell your supervisor.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES-

No specific, unique first aid actions are associated with this program.

First Aid Awareness and Actions-None

FORMS USED

None

TRAINING

Required Materials-Refer to applicable PPE

Employee Training- On the job training

Supervisor Training- On the job training

Outline: [0] – hour class

REFERENCES/RESOURCES

WAC 204-41-060- Utility Meter Readers

REVISION RECORD

Revision No.	Revision Date	Approval Date	Change
1.0.0	08-09-07		Initial design.
1.0.1	11-15-17		Program Updated

APPROVALS

Safety Committee Chairperson	Date	General Manager	Date
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DEFINITIONS

Term

ANNEX

APPENDIX

Sample Forms

WAC/RCW

WAC 204-41-060