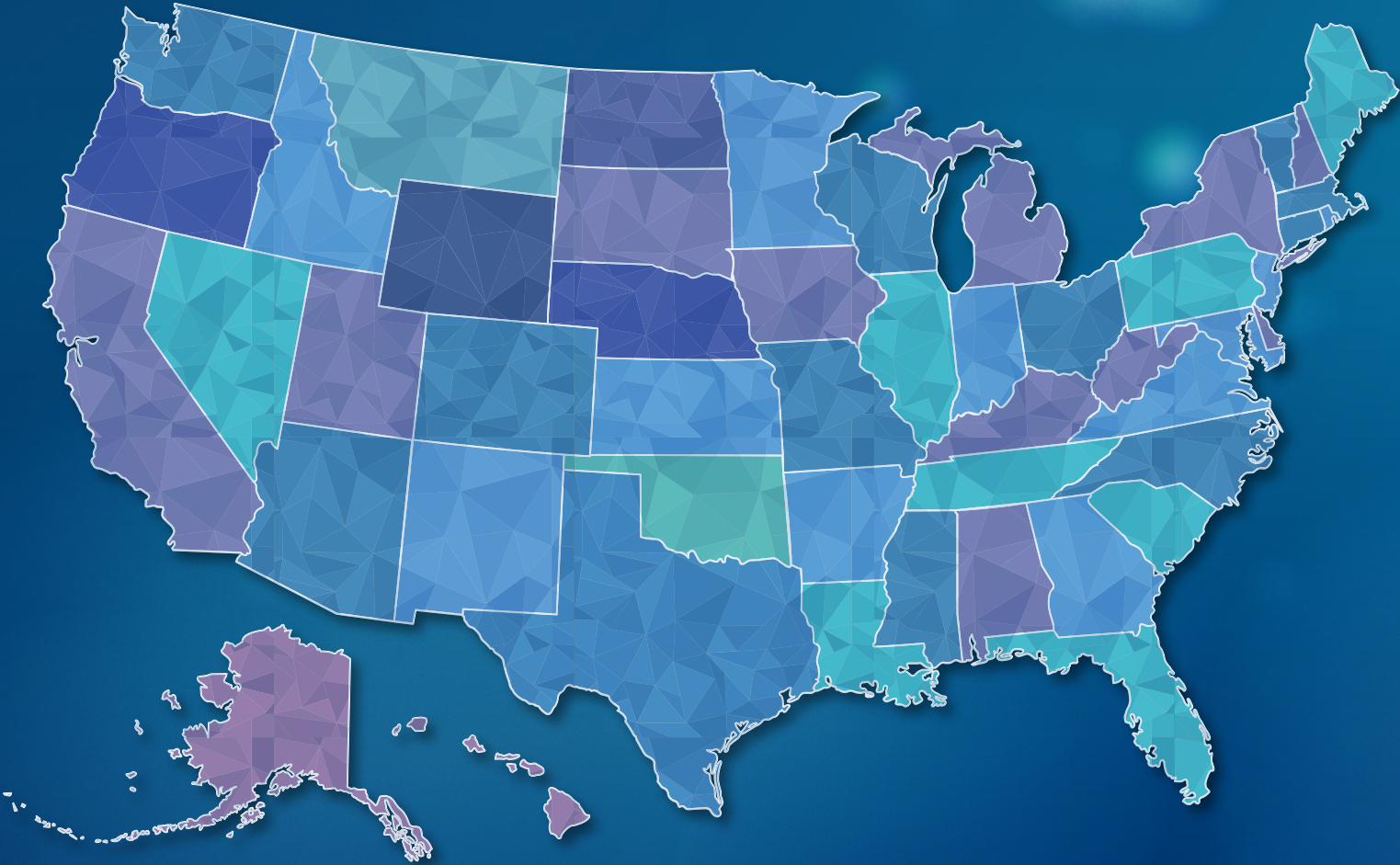


State Energy Office Support of Energy Security, Continuity, and Reliability through the COVID-19 Pandemic:

2020-2021 YEAR IN REVIEW



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The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) posed new challenges to the energy sector throughout 2020 and 2021. The pandemic highlighted several previously unanticipated issues with implications for energy system reliability, workforce safety and security, and traditional energy emergency response.

State Energy Offices played a crucial role in state, local, and national efforts to ensure energy security by contributing to information-sharing, cross-sector coordination, removing barriers to energy sector industry operational continuity, and enabling industry emergency response in a limited environment. While many of the initial reliability and workforce continuity challenges have since been mitigated, sustained monitoring and response efforts persist.

Since the outset of the national and state emergency declarations, the National Association of State Energy Officials (NASEO), with support from the Department of Energy's Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security, and Emergency Response (CESER), has supported State Energy Offices by hosting regular and *ad-hoc* calls with State Energy Offices, NASEO Affiliates¹, industry partners, federal entities, and others to support information-sharing, peer-to-peer engagement, and issue escalation through established and new communications channels.

This document highlights the exemplary issues identified and addressed by State Energy Officials involved in the energy sector emergency response during the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020. This list is not exhaustive, but is comprised of notable, specific examples of State Energy Office actions to resolve or assist with challenges that arose for energy security. Energy Offices from all States, Territories, and the District of Columbia helped to ensure the delivery and continuity of energy to meet the unique needs of their energy partners and citizens. This report also identifies recommendations and next steps as they pertain to the roles of State Energy Offices and other stakeholders in the energy sector's ongoing and future pandemic response emergencies.

State Energy Offices also worked with schools, hospitals, and other public-serving facilities to address Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) - related indoor air quality, energy efficiency, and facility upgrades to support the public health efforts in light of the pandemic. These actions, while important, are not addressed in this report.

For insights pertaining to state regulatory perspectives on the public utility sector's COVID-19 response, please see findings from the [National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners' \(NARUC\) Emergency Preparedness, Recovery and Resiliency Task Force \(EEPR TF\) Subcommittee on COVID-19](#).

Disclaimer:

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¹ [NASEO's Affiliate Partners](#) include representatives from business, trade associations, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and government.

NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF State Energy Office Involvement in Pandemic Response

States and industry partners noted pervasive challenges with classifying energy sector workers as “essential” or “critical,” a designation which would prioritize them for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), COVID-19 testing, and COVID-19 vaccinations. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) maintains a [broad list](#) of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers (ECIW). For the energy sector this includes, but is not limited to, power plant and distribution system control room operators, natural gas technicians, propane providers, and line workers. The ECIW, while helpful, did not offer any prioritization among its listed worker types, leading to inconsistent prioritization left up to state discretion.

- The **Colorado Energy Office**, in coordination with the Colorado Public Utilities Office, was instrumental in assisting public utility partners in acquiring priority testing. NASEO was contacted by representatives from the American Public Power Association (APPA) regarding the inability of two Colorado utilities to secure priority testing for a limited number of control room operators that needed to be tested in order to perform their work. Control room operators are highly specialized workers who must be in person to perform their duties; remote work is not an option. NASEO notified the Colorado Energy Office, which elevated the issue through the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). APPA later noted that by elevating the issue to the SEOC, its control room operators were able to receive the needed testing to perform their duties safely.
- The **Hawai’i State Energy Office**² (HSEO) developed an “Energy Stakeholder Questionnaire for COVID-19 Testing of Essential Employees” in coordination with ESF - 8 (Public Health and Medical Services) which included criteria to determine prioritization of energy sector personnel.
 - HSEO coordinated with multiple incident command organizations and energy sector companies to support an exemption process from state and county quarantine requirements and restrictions which resulted in uninterrupted interstate and interisland essential travel for critical energy infrastructure workers. In September 2020, the HSEO became part of the core planning team formed to develop the state’s COVID-19 Vaccination Plan. HSEO has led continuous energy sector engagement in both the COVID-19 Prioritization & Allocation and the Communications Working Groups established under the Plan to identify and outreach to energy sector frontline essential workers to ensure early vaccination opportunities for workers who maintain the state’s energy supplies.
 - Additionally, HSEO supported the State of Hawai’i Vaccination Plan: As part of the planning and implementation of the State of Hawai’i Vaccination Plan, HSEO participated in the Communications, and the Allocation/Prioritization Working Groups to ensure effective and timely information exchange with energy companies and providing guidance on identification and prioritization of mission- and business-critical energy workers for the COVID-19 vaccine.³

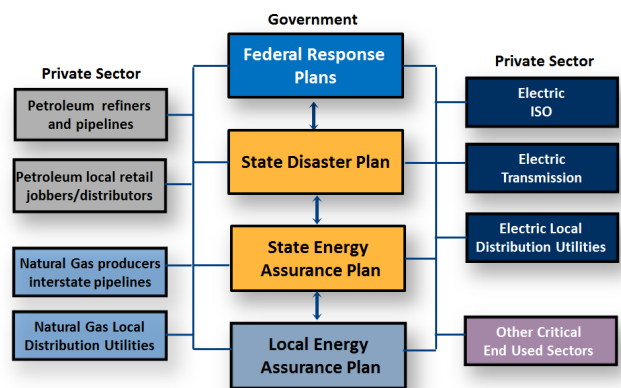
² Hawai’i State Energy Office, Hawai’i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism

³ 2020 Annual Report, Hawai’i State Energy Office, https://energy.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/HSEO_2020_Annual_Report.pdf

States were notified about industry concerns over credentialing and travel restrictions for mutual aid workers who might need to cross state lines in order to respond to an energy emergency (e.g., hurricanes, wildfires or other).

- The **Washington State Energy Office**⁴ sent NASEO a request to connect the state with Canadian electric utilities to inquire about the ability of their crews to provide mutual aid response to Washington electric utilities during COVID. The state wanted to proactively identify any additional safety precautions it would need to implement and any restrictions that might limit Canadian utilities' ability to provide mutual aid support. By working through the channels established by the Energy Government Coordinating Council (EGCC) and the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC), NASEO and CESER helped to facilitate an introduction between the state and their Canadian electric utility counterparts. This was a preemptive effort to determine requirements and restrictions ahead of a mutual assistance request that would necessitate cross-border travel.
- Broadly and consistently, State Energy Offices were instrumental in responding to energy delivery and reliability concerns of first responders, consumers, businesses, and energy industry partners writ large. NASEO helped facilitate peer information-sharing opportunities between State Energy Offices to enable sharing of successful approaches and tactics. State Energy Offices were proactive in sharing relevant energy sector information with other offices through the weekly, biweekly, and monthly NASEO COVID-19 State Response Coordination calls; through the NASEO Energy Security Committee Forum, a secure, password-protected forum for State Energy Officials; and on innumerable ad hoc instances.
 - NASEO and State Energy Offices leveraged CESER's [COVID-19 Energy Sector Response Efforts and Frequently Asked Questions](#) page and its COVID-19 Situation reports (SitReps) to share consistently updated and verified information with energy and other state stakeholders.
 - State Energy Officials also leveraged the [Energy Emergency Assurance Coordinators](#) (EEAC) sharepoint site which enabled them to connect and share information with state officials (e.g., public utility commissioners, governor's staff, emergency managers) in other states.
- Additionally, State Energy Offices were involved in the issuance and extension of a number of different fuel waivers at the state level and advocated in tandem with industry partners to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) for the same waivers at the national level. These waivers aided in removing barriers for fuel delivery nationwide, including addressing the national truck driver shortage by reducing the certification requirements for drivers' licenses. The following waivers were issued:
 - [U.S Environmental Protection Agency waivers for Reid Vapor Pressure](#)
 - [FMCSA requirement waivers for drivers with Commercial Driver's Licenses \(CDL\) and Commercial Learner's Permits \(CLP\)](#)
 - [FMCSA emergency declarations for Hours of Service \(HoS\) Waivers](#)
 - Other waivers pertaining to interstate drivers operating Commercial Motor Vehicles (CMVs)
 - Additional state fuel quality waivers

Coordination of Plans PLANNING INTERFACES



Agreement for Enhanced Federal and State Energy Emergency Coordination, Communications, and Information Sharing. June 24, 2015

⁴ Washington State Energy Office, Washington State Department of Commerce

Due to the unprecedented reduction in demand for petroleum and other fuel products caused by the pandemic, states assisted in atypical fuel measures to support industry in extreme circumstances. These measures were further complicated by CDC guidance on social distancing.

- During the initial pandemic shutdowns in March, the Tennessee Fuel and Convenience Store Association requested that the **Tennessee Energy Office**⁵, Division of Underground Storage Tanks (UST) issue an Enforcement Discretion Memo lifting the requirement to conduct certain operational testing and visual inspection of tankers. Normally, a facility is required to conduct these periodic inspections for environmental and safety reasons. However, given the CDC's social distancing guidance, the potential for personnel to be exposed to and transmit COVID during the inspections, the fact that inspections require gas stations to shut down for two to six hours and the increased criticality and need for fuel for emergency services, UST determined that there existed undue risk in performing the inspections. Thus, UST stated it would not issue any Notices of Violation or Enforcement Orders to facilities not performing the inspections and testing during the emergency.
- Many states issued state-level Reid Vapor Pressure (RVP) waivers and amplified the need for the U.S Environmental Protection Agency to issue RVP Waivers to support the continued sale of winter-blend gasoline into the spring and summer months.

States noted that there were significant requests for energy sector information, economic forecasts, and supply projections from government partners and consumers.

- The **Tennessee Energy Office/Office of Environment and Conservation (TDEC)** formally designated the State Emergency Services Coordinator 12 – Energy as the Infrastructure Branch Manager for the COVID-19 response.⁶ TDEC provided Unified Command and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) leadership with energy sector information – power outages, fuel supply chain status, pipeline conditions – throughout the duration of the COVID-19 response.
- The **Utah Energy Office**⁷ created a [COVID-19 Energy Sector Status report](#) for energy sector partners, which included details on declining demand for goods, resources and services, overproduction, limited financing opportunities, project postponements and cancellations, insufficient PPE quantities for essential personnel, consumer uncertainty, and disrupted supply chains.
- The **Washington State Energy Office within the Department of Commerce**:
 - Preemptively requested pandemic plans from utilities and conducted a survey to understand how each energy provider (e.g., electric, natural gas, & petroleum) managed the changes during Washington's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order in order to track the operational changes for each provider.
 - Tracked resource requests to better understand the supply chain challenges for utilities' pre-COVID PPE requirements, post-COVID PPE requirements, and disinfectant needs. The information collected enabled the State Energy Office to support resource requests made by consumer owned utilities submitted to the county emergency management operation centers, share vendor information directly with utilities for bulk purchasing, and connect utilities with local manufacturers who retooled their businesses to create PPE and sanitation equipment.
 - Tracked the consumption rate of different PPE and disinfectant supplies and monitored supply chain issues. This information allowed the state to better advocate for the priority allocation of PPE to consumer owned utilities until their normal supply chains stabilized.

5 Office of Energy Programs, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation

6 Emergency Services Coordinator 12 - Energy in Tennessee is equivalent to Emergency Support Function 12 - Energy

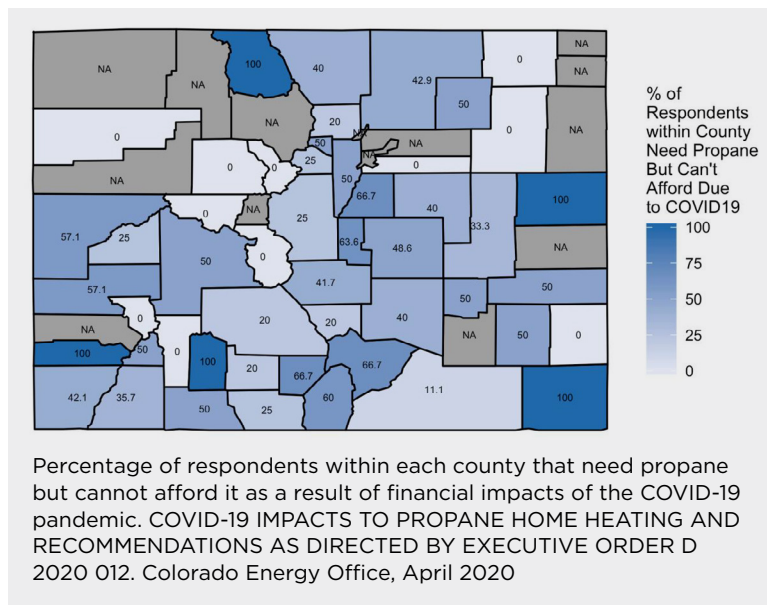
7 Utah Governor's Office of Energy Development

States highlighted concerns regarding energy sector workforce security and continuity of operations.

- The **Pennsylvania Energy Office**⁸ contacted the Pennsylvania National Guard at the request of the PA Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN). Several water and wastewater plants had multiple employees and operators concurrently serving in the National Guard and requested that their employees be exempt from being activated for State Active Duty. State activation would mean the departure of multiple critical staff which could affect the plant’s ability to operate. As a result, the PA National Guard amended their COVID-19 operations orders to allow Commanders’ flexibility and discretion in activating guardsmen who were also essential critical infrastructure employees, including critical water/wastewater and energy sector personnel.
- The **Tennessee Energy Office** contributed to the development of the “Guidance for Bureau of Environment Operations During COVID-19 Situation” with TDEC’s internal COVID-19 task force.
- Multiple State Energy Offices coordinated regionally and with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to issue intrastate and regional waivers and share Commercial Driver’s License Waivers and Hours of Service Waivers for deliveries of livestock, medical supplies, and PPE that were issued by FMCSA.

States identified and helped to address concerns over utility disconnects, late fees, and inability to pay bills, which were major issues for low income or financially struggling citizens.

- Members of NASEO’s Energy Equity Taskforce, NASEO staff, and other key partners identified [mechanisms, examples, and resources](#) that may assist states seeking to mitigate unmanageable utility bill impacts on low- and moderate-income (LMI) and/or unemployed households due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A number of State Energy Offices developed small business relief grant programs, in part funded by the US DOE Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) and provided emergency financial assistance to utilities and customers to avoid shutoffs and disconnects.
- At the directive of a State Executive Order, the **Colorado Energy Office** produced a [study on the impacts of propane home heating and recommendations for propane marketers](#) on how to educate customers on the State’s Low-Income Energy Assistance Program and provide guidance to those struggling to pay heating bills.
- The **Washington State Energy Office** supported the governor’s executive orders for utility customers facing financial hardships due to COVID-19 mitigation efforts, as well as state legislation covering all energy subsectors, to support economic relief and recovery.



8 Energy Programs Office, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

Other Notable Issues

- States cited inconsistent guidance between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other entities regarding testing prioritization and PPE allocation as a source of confusion, as both were referred to as resources by industry sector partners.
- Medical facilities, and subsequently states, expressed concerns over the continued availability of medical grade CO₂ and other gases. While no specific shortages or emergencies occurred, states did monitor the potential for a cascading shortage, given that industrial and agricultural-grade CO₂—generally a byproduct of ethanol production—experienced significant shortages due to reduced ethanol demand. This highlighted the sensitive interdependencies of the energy sector and agricultural sector, which would benefit from a deeper examination.
 - The **Tennessee Energy Office** and the **Wisconsin Energy Office**⁹ notified their respective Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency DHS CISA agents assigned to their states. As a result, CISA agents raised the issue with the White House COVID Task Force.

Successes

- All state energy offices transitioned to virtual teleworking for various periods of time throughout the COVID-19 pandemic via their continuity of operations and/or remote teleworking guidance provided by each respective state, with some still remaining remote to date (September 2021). Despite this work format, most energy offices were able to sustain their energy emergency response duties. The State Energy Office responses to Hurricane Laura and western wildfires, for example, occurred without any notable obstacles.

Recommendations and Next Steps:

- State Energy Offices should consider adding or revising a pandemic response subsection or annex to their Energy Assurance Plans.
- State Energy Offices should continue to share information pertaining to nationwide response and recovery events with each other and federal partners via a regular convening mechanism hosted by NASEO.
- States Energy Offices should consider working with industry to preemptively designate energy sector workers as critical or essential and define criteria ahead of time that states and industry can use to quickly identify those personnel.
- State Energy Offices should consider adding or revising inter-sector interdependencies subsections or annexes to their Energy Assurance/Security Plans for the following sectors:
 - Public Health
 - Agriculture
 - Transportation
- Utilities should consider sharing sequestration and pandemic response and recovery plans with State Emergency Support Function - 12 (ESF 12), energy emergency assurance coordinators (EEACs), and governor's energy advisors prior to an incident. This recommendation speaks to the value of collaborative public-private exercises to test these plans and better develop the workforce involved with the response.

⁹ Wisconsin Office of Energy Innovation, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin



*National Association of
State Energy Officials*