

**2020 CSAC Challenge Awards  
Executive Summary**

**TITLE: COVID-19 COMMUNICATION**

**OVERVIEW:** Proactive communication strategies help operators make informed business decisions during a crisis and further strengthen trusting relationships and regulatory partnership.

**CHALLENGE:** The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for accurate and timely distribution of information. As the pandemic continues, state and local public health orders and associated industry guidance change frequently, impacting regulated businesses. With the County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health's (DEH) more than 40 diverse programs, it is critical that information relevant to businesses is shared in a timely manner so operators can make key business decisions, including how and if they can operate. With program diversity comes a need for a multi-faceted approach to communication; a one size fits all simply does not work.

**SOLUTION:** DEH utilized a variety of communication platforms to reach out to operators to ensure timely notification of new information. To facilitate operator understanding and compliance, DEH created various guidance documents, protocols, online applications, and frequently asked questions. To enhance the distribution of information, resource documents were available in the top 10 languages spoken in the San Diego region: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Somali, Korean, Karen, Chinese, Farsi, and Arabic.

To promote DEH's and other agency COVID-19 resource documents, DEH posted documents on program website [publication pages](#), provided links to the County's [COVID-19 webpage](#), and placed brochures in public lobbies. DEH used direct email or a web-based email management application, GovDelivery, to send information to operators. For small programs, such as organized camps and drinking water systems, staff emailed permitted operators specific industry guidance and information. For larger programs, like the retail food facility and hazardous materials programs, GovDelivery was used. Emails included staff contact information for questions. Since March, DEH has sent 80 GovDelivery messages and 54 direct operator emails on COVID-19 updates.

Social media is an effective tool for information in picture form, a graphic, or contains a small amount of content. DEH used Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to share messages, updates, and to re-post local County press conference which allowed operators to receive updates from the Health Officer 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Since March 2020, DEH has posted COVID-19 content over 200 times.

Staff participated in virtual presentations, telebriefings, and professional organization meetings to share information. Examples include the California Restaurant Association (CRA), San Diego Tourism Authority, the Industrial Environmental Association (IEA), and the body art industry. Virtual meetings provided industry an opportunity to connect with DEH to have their stories heard, provide feedback, ask questions, and receive real time responses. This proactive approach to communicating built trust with industry and promoted compliance.

**INNOVATION:** Proactive information sharing and education via a variety of platforms to reach diverse audiences is inclusive and supports a positive regulator/operator partnership. Providing valuable information in a format that supports operators understanding increases engagement and provides clarity to complicated information. It builds trust and fosters more honest communication between operators and staff, which helps to understand each other's perspective and concerns. This in turn helped DEH to create resources for operators.

**RESULTS:** DEH received positive feedback from its regulated operators and industry associations, including CRA's local chapter, San Diego County Dental and Medical Societies, BIONET, and IEA. It further promoted compliance with Health Officer orders

**REPLICABILITY:** Utilizing a variety of platforms to proactively communicate is simple and inexpensive. Collect email addresses and create group emails by program types, use free social media platforms which can share links to documents with valuable information available on websites and conduct virtual meetings using low-cost or free web-based programs. Build relationships with local professional associations to promote information exchange and utilize other agency resources if unable to develop guidance or information documents.

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