

## News : US oil and gas trade groups voice confidence on industry preparedness for virus

By Maya Weber

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**US** oil and **gas** industry officials Wednesday expressed confidence in the sector's ability to keep energy supplies flowing amid the coronavirus outbreak and downplayed the likelihood of supply chain interruptions.

Suzanne Lemieux, **American** Petroleum Institute manager of operations, security and emergency response, said preparing for the coronavirus was "not a new planning scenario" for sophisticated companies that have faced international viruses before such Ebola, SARS, MERS and H1N1.

"There are a lot of conditions that **we** 're operating under and may see in the future that are similar to what happens during a hurricane or natural disaster," said Lemieux. "As far as production, refining and transportation, **we** don't see a scenario that would directly affect the supply chain at this point." She made reference to the industry's ability to keep operations running even "while going through minimal staffing."

She and other trade group officials highlighted their ability to share workforce resources across locations, should one area experience problems.

### Gas pipelines

C.J. Osman, Interstate Natural **Gas** Association of America vice president for operations, safety and integrity, emphasized the resilience afforded by the interconnected nature of the natural **gas** grid and diverse **US** sources of **gas** supply. And he noted that pipeline companies are standing up business continuity plans.

**INGAA** members are working on social distancing, for instance, limiting access to key sites like control rooms, and rotating workgroups into different shifts to separate key workers. He also cited cleaning protocols, particularly at key locations, tests of communications to ensure continuity, and standing up plans to respond to an infection or event at a given location, similar to plans to respond to pipeline disruptions, as required for Department of Transportation exercises on a recurring basis.

The officials expressed confidence that their preparation, much of which is required by regulation, sets them up well to face the current emergency.

### Pandemic planning

"Pandemic emergency planning is part of the DNA of the **gas** industry and our members," said Andrew Lu, **American Gas** Association managing director for operations and engineering services. Such planning has been part of **gas** utilities' emergency drills and simulations for decades, he said.

He noted steps to reduce virus exposure such as ensuring supplies of soap and water for field staff, keeping six-foot separation from the public, and, where possible, deferring non-essential work inside customers' homes.

Lara Swett, **American** Fuel and **Petrochemical** Manufacturers vice president of technical and safety programs, said companies have set up their own emergency response centers, established communications across the sites, and have been implementing their customized COVID-19 plans.

"These include considerations for staffing, regular disinfecting, remote working and implementing social distancing for all personnel functions," she said.

The groups also noted their regular contact with government agencies, such as the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Energy, Department of Transportation, and FEMA.

Asked about how refineries or other industrial facilities would respond to staff shortages at a specific facility, Swett suggested in such a case there would be consideration of changing operations to adjust for staffing levels. "But the most important thing is that operations are maintained safely. So as things come out, this is a very fluid situation. That is something that our facilities and our companies are seriously looking at," she said.

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