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Water Environment Federation Convening a Blue-Ribbon Panel to Evaluate Biological Hazards and Precautions for Wastewater Workers

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – To ensure the protection of wastewater workers during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond, the Water Environment Federation is convening a blue-ribbon panel of experts to evaluate information on biological hazards and safety precautions.

The panel is comprised of a diverse array of experts involved in water operations, science, health and safety and will provide appropriate input to U.S. government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as the World Health Organization (WHO).

“The top priority of the Water Environment Federation is always to ensure the safety and health of the frontline people in the water workforce, who protect our communities not just during the coronavirus pandemic but every single day,” said WEF President Jackie Jarrell. “In keeping with the WEF tradition of educational and technical excellence, the blue-ribbon panel will make certain that our information on hazards and safety and the guidance of organizations such as the WHO, CDC, OSHA, and EPA are based on the latest evidence and absolute best science.”

The coronavirus pandemic has shown the need for timely, reliable information on biological hazards from wastewater and appropriate protective practices for wastewater workers. The WEF Manual of Practice, *Safety, Health and Security in Wastewater Systems*, includes a chapter that discusses types of hazards, how to prevent and treat infections, and which workers are at risk. The panel of experts will review the advice provided in the Manual of Practice and other WEF publications and guidance from federal agencies to determine if supplemental advice or recommendations are warranted to protect worker health and safety. The panel is expected to work quickly and present its initial findings within a few weeks.

The panel is chaired by Dr. Art Umble, who leads the Global Wastewater Sector for Stantec Consulting and previously managed a publicly owned water and wastewater utility. Dr. Umble also serves on the advisory council of the Water Research Foundation (WRF), the editorial board for the Water Environment Research (WER) journal, and university advisory boards for environmental engineering, and provides peer review for academic journals and collaborative research projects.

Panel members represent a variety of academics, practitioners and policy-makers in disciplines from across the water sector, including public health, safety and security, utility management, collection systems, facility operations, municipal design, industrial, laboratory services, and microbiology.

The panel members are:

- Dr. Art Umble (Chair), Stantec
- Dr. Allegra da Silva (Vice Chair), Brown and Caldwell
- Tim Page-Bottorff (Vice Chair), SafeStart
- Dr. Charles Gerba, University of Arizona
- Dr. Kyle Bibby, University of Notre Dame
- Dr. Charles Haas, Drexel University
- Dr. Leonard Casson, University of Pittsburgh
- Dr. Kartik Chandran, Columbia University
- Dr. Mark Sobsey, University of North Carolina and World Health Organization
- Dr. Mark LeChevalier, Dr. Water Consulting
- John Bannen, Inframark
- Dr. Earnest Blatchley III, Purdue University
- David Gill, DC Water
- Dr. Naoko Munakata, Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts

WEF's overall response to the coronavirus pandemic has included providing the latest technical and scientific information to the water community, offering educational opportunities through digital programming, and communicating regularly about resources and assistance available to the sector. WEF maintains comprehensive information and resources related to coronavirus at www.wef.org/coronavirus

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About WEF

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a not-for-profit technical and educational organization of 35,000 individual members and 75 affiliated Member Associations representing water quality professionals around the world. Since 1928, WEF and its members have protected public health and the environment. As a global water sector leader, our mission is to connect water professionals; enrich the expertise of water professionals; increase the awareness of the impact and value of water; and provide a platform for water sector innovation. To learn more, visit www.wef.org.