

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE WASTEWATER INDUSTRY

The COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted almost every aspect of our lives, with many of the activities we took for granted now either impossible or at least a challenge. We cannot meet up with family and friends, music and sporting events have been cancelled, and even a trip to the shops may need careful planning. One of the biggest changes has been the widespread closure of schools and workplaces.

With more people than ever now working, studying and socialising at home, it is worth thinking about what impact this is having on our utilities and broadband services.

Firstly, it will come as no surprise to learn that [internet providers reported a surge in activity](#) due to high volumes of video calls and streaming entertainment. Consumption of electricity, gas and water is also likely to have increased for many households – as has the amount of rubbish, recycling and, of course, wastewater they produce.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen growing demand for [SPB units](#) (signal/power/barrel) from customers in the wastewater industry, at a time when scraper bridges could be under more pressure than usual. The apparent shortage of toilet roll in the first weeks of the pandemic led to [reports of people flushing wipes, kitchen roll and even newspaper down the toilet](#), potentially wreaking havoc on plumbing and water treatment systems.

Scraper bridges operate in tough environments at the best of times. During the COVID-19 crisis, wastewater firms will rely on the integrity of their SPB units even more as consumer behaviour changes and potentially brings new challenges.

So, what exactly does the pandemic mean for the wastewater industry and what measures are water treatment companies putting in place to tackle any problems? We spoke to Shaun Stevens, General Manager of [EPS Water](#), to find out.

“The fact that people are working from home (i.e. not in their usual place) is causing changes to the loading on treatment plants, especially in rural areas, although the drier weather in April helped to limit this. This means that water companies’ process teams are having to work really hard to implement changes to control systems and treatment set points to try and address this issue. Recently, there has been an increase in demand for temporary treatment units on plants that cannot make the necessary adjustments using the existing assets.

“Wet wipes are an ongoing problem for the industry, and you might expect it to get worse because people are at home. However, the anecdotal feedback I’m getting is that, outside of major cities, inlet works are handling this in the normal way. It’s rare for screenings to significantly reduce the performance of rotating scrapers bridges, although they will impact the travelling bridges in rectangular tanks if screens fail to perform.

“While households are inevitably producing more wastewater during this time, it is worth noting that, with restaurants and fast food businesses closed or on reduced output, the risk of fatbergs developing is lower than usual.

“From an operational perspective, we are finding that remote working – including e-meetings and more flexible diaries – brings benefits for our customers. Information response times are now quicker and dialogue between water companies and lower-tier suppliers has also improved.”

People rarely think about what happens to their wastewater, nor the processes involved in treating it to safeguard the environment and so we can enjoy clean drinking water once again. We clearly need greater public awareness around the importance of disposing of waste responsibly, not just now but also to tackle other persistent problems, like fatbergs. Although the systems are robust, we must all play our part in ensuring water treatment plants do not become overburdened with the wrong type of waste at this critical time.

Similar to utilities companies, treatment managers need a rapid response if a scraper bridge goes out of action, if they are to avoid hefty fines. This is why the [BGB web shop](#) offers a 48 hour turnaround, ready to get new components to treatment plants as fast as possible. Everyone knows about the disruption to people's lives which occurs when water no longer runs from the tap, but just as important is the wastewater which flows down the drain.

To find out more about BGB solutions for water treatment systems, click [here](#).

Ends

