OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND HOMELAND SECURITY

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County Executive

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MEMORANDUM

November 6, 2026

TO: Natali Fani-González, President
Montgomery County Council

FROM: Luke J. Hodgson, Director
Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security

SUBJECT: WSSC Power Issue 30-Day Report

In response to the power issue at the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission's (WSSC) Potomac Filtration Plant, the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (OEMHS) activated the Emergency Management Group (EMG) between Tuesday, September 29, 2026 and Friday, October 2, 2026. Montgomery County Code, Section 2-17. "State of public emergency," requires that:

> *Within 30 days after the end of any state of emergency or any other incident that required the activation of the Emergency Management Group or any subgroup of the Emergency Management Group, the Executive or the Executive's designee must inform the Council of the facts of the event; any casualties, damages, or costs; and long-term implications of the event.*

OEMHS has assembled basic facts of the event to meet this requirement. Within 60 days of this event, OEMHS will provide the Council an update to this initial briefing and a list of lessons learned.

Background

- WSSC operates two water filtration plants to meet a systemwide customer demand of nearly 170 million gallons per day (MGD). The Potomac Water Filtration Plant produces up to 283 MGD, while the Patuxent plant can produce a maximum of 100 MGD. These plants are responsible for pulling water from the Potomac and Patuxent rivers, reducing contaminants in the water, then pushing it through the commission's vast distribution system.
- WSSC strategically produces water to meet customer demand. Because water usage fluctuates, and to provide a buffer should equipment fail, WSSC maintains treated water in numerous storage tanks.

- Water usage peaks in the morning and evening, when customers prepare to go to work or school, then return home. Overnight, when demand is low, WSSC refills their storage tanks to prepare for the next day.
- The Potomac plant relies on two redundant power feeds from PEPCO to energize these operations. The plant can operate fully with either one, so it does not require both to be online. Beginning in mid-September, WSSC and PEPCO pulled one feeder offline for routine maintenance. The plant continued normal operations using the remaining feeder.

Situation Overview

- On Tuesday, September 29, 2026, at approximately 4:30 AM, the primary electrical feeder failed, halting water production at the plant. PEPCO immediately mobilized to restore the feeder that had been taken down for maintenance while they investigated the cause of the primary feeder's failure. WSSC reported that they had high volumes of water in storage to support customer demand through the morning, and they were ramping up production at the Patuxent Plant, hoping to compensate for diminished production at the Potomac Plant.
- On Tuesday, September 29, 2026, at approximately 8:45 AM, WSSC issued an urgent Essential Water Use Only Request for all 1.9 million customers across Montgomery and Prince George's counties. This request was precautionary, designed to preserve water currently in storage for longer while crews worked on repairs.
- On Tuesday, September 29, 2026, at approximately 10:30 AM, PEPCO restored the backup feeder that had been taken down for maintenance. Crews were testing the feeds and preparing to restart power distribution to the plant. Crews had not yet identified the cause of the primary feeder's failure.
- On Tuesday, September 29, 2026, at approximately 12:45 PM, WSSC reported that crews were still working on restoration.
- On Tuesday, September 29, 2026, at approximately 1:45 PM, WSSC conducted an urgent conference call with Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and State of Maryland emergency managers. WSSC advised that PEPCO restored power to the feeders, but electrical equipment failures within the WSSC, likely caused by the initial power outage, prevented electricity from supplying the plant. WSSC estimated that some customers would begin losing water pressure by 3:00 PM, most customers would lose water pressure by 4:00 PM, and all customers would lose water service by 5:00 PM.
- On Tuesday, September 29, 2026, at approximately 4:00 PM, WSSC established a temporary workaround that restored full power, and the plant began producing water. By the evening, WSSC felt confident that the temporary solution would remain stable overnight, allowing storage tanks to refill. However, WSSC kept the Essential Water Use Only Request in place.
- On Wednesday, September 30, 2026, at 5:00 PM, WSSC lifted the Essential Water Use Only Request for all customers.
- On Thursday, October 1, 2026, at approximately 12:20 PM, WSSC performed a repair to an internal transformer, resulting in permanent power restoration.
- On Tuesday, October 6, 2026, at approximately 11:00 AM, WSSC performed repairs and configured a key electrical component for the second feeder. This effort permanently restored both electrical feeds.

EMG Activation

The EMG is a multi-disciplinary team of 120+ agencies charged with executing the County's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). Partner agencies include dozens of County departments and

offices, municipalities, utility providers, hospitals, Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College, and voluntary organizations.

In response to this incident, the EMG was activated on Tuesday, September 29, 2026. The following was conducted while the EG was activated:

- At 6:30 AM, WSSC notified OEMHS of the power issue.
- At 8:30 AM, WSSC requested that OEMHS distribute their Essential Water Use Only Request via Alert Montgomery.
- At 9:00 AM, OEMHS elevated the EMG's activation to Level 3: Enhanced Monitoring. OEMHS upstaffed the Public Safety Joint Operations Center (PSJOC), alongside partners with the Department of Police (MCPD) and Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS). Operators remained in close contact with WSSC and monitored systemwide statuses for potential issues.
- At 9:30 AM, OEMHS issued an Alert Montgomery to all registered contacts within WSSC's service area.
- At 10:06 AM, OEMHS issued its first situational awareness notice to EMG partners.
- At 1:45 PM, OEMHS joined a conference call with emergency managers from WSSC, Prince George's County, and the Maryland Department of Emergency Management.
- At 2:15 PM, the call concluded. OEMHS, MCFRS, and MCPD executives, working together in the PSJOC, immediately began strategizing the response, including the full mobilization of the EMG, the development of firefighting water supply plans, and the coordination of public messaging.
- At 2:43 PM, OEMHS directed personnel to stand up the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
- At 2:45 PM, OEMHS conducted a Senior Policy Group Coordination Call.
- At 3:08 PM, OEMHS notified the EMG to respond to the EOC.
- At 4:00 PM, OEMHS escalated the EMG to Level 1: Full Activation. EMG representatives began arriving at the EOC.
- By 6:00 PM, the EOC was fully staffed with all requested EMG representatives. The EOC remained open until 9:00 PM. During this period, EOC staff developed contingency plans for public water distribution, firefighting operations, hospital and healthcare facility operations, and public messaging. By 8:00 PM, the County began receiving its first water pallet delivery.

Between Wednesday, September 30, 2026, and Friday, October 2, 2026, the EMG remained activated to continue contingency planning while WSSC worked to perform permanent repairs. These activities included risk analysis, points of water distribution, public messaging, healthcare system support, and demobilization.

Key Impacts

- **Causalities** – No injuries or fatalities were reported.
- **Damage Assessment** – No damage to County facilities or fleet were reported.
- **Costs** – At the time of this memo, the total costs reported by County departments and offices is approximately $21,000. This figure includes personnel costs, including overtime and upstaffing, bottled water procurement, and food for essential staff.

  The County Code requires this initial notification within 30 days of the end of the activation of the Emergency Management Group. Because of the intrinsic delay in accounting and timekeeping system reporting, the costs provided by departments and offices should be

considered preliminary. As timekeeping and expense systems generate additional reports, invoices are received, and damages are fully assessed, OEMHS will continue to receive additional costs that will be recorded and relayed in subsequent communications.

- **Government Operations** – Montgomery County Government facilities maintained water service throughout the event.
- **Emergency Services** –MCFRS reported no interruption to hydrant reliability during this event. In the PSJOC, MCFRS executives quickly developed firefighting water supply contingency plans upon notification from WSSC of a potential water outage.
- **Transportation Infrastructure** – No impacts reported.
- **Mass Care Services, Emergency Assistance, and Housing** – No impacts reported.
- **Public Health and Medical Services** – No impacts were reported to local hospitals and other healthcare facilities. However, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) coordinated with regional healthcare emergency managers to prepare for a potential water outage.
- **Utilities** – Despite the stalled water production on Tuesday, September 29, OEMHS is not aware of any customers losing water pressure or service.

Long-Term Implications

A preliminary review of the response demonstrated the value of the PSJOC in monitoring and proactively responding to highly consequential events. While Montgomery County acted quickly and decisively, this incident highlighted numerous opportunities to improve water emergency preparedness and resilience across multiple capabilities, including government operations, emergency services, healthcare, mass care, and public information.

OEMHS is conducting an after-action review (AAR) with EMG partner agencies to identify additional lessons learned.

I thank Council for their ongoing support throughout this incident and in the days and weeks that followed. We look forward to continuing to work with Council to refine our collective whole-of-community preparedness for, response to, and recovery from incidents such as this.

As explained, additional information is forthcoming as further data is relayed to OEMHS. However, please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

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