

Open House Guidelines for Public Water Facilities



New England Communications Collaborative





Open House Guidelines for Public Water Facilities

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Clean water, drinking water, and stormwater

impact the community in many ways, and public outreach activities will help raise the visibility of these essential services that your utility provides.

Many national organizations have designated days or weeks throughout the year to recognize the value of water. In New England, we have established the month of May as “Water’s Worth It” to highlight outreach efforts, which makes it a peak time to host an open house at your plant. Bringing people in—school administrators, teachers, students, town officials, key organizations, and residents—will help them get a first-hand look at what you do and highlight the importance of investments in infrastructure and employees. It may also inspire a new generation of careers in the industry.

An open house can be done any time of the year, but these events can be especially impactful when done in conjunction with other notable events happening, such as National Water Week, Water’s Worth It Month, Infrastructure Week, Drinking Water Week, and Imagine a Day without Water. At an open house, you can combine a series of special events as well as conclude other outreach activities you may have sponsored, such as display winning poster contest entries or water fair projects.



Benefits of holding an open house

An open house will require time, effort, and resources, but if well planned, promoted, and publicized, it holds the power to attract widespread community attendance, generate considerable media coverage, and promote public awareness and understanding of your utility.

- Consumers will learn how utilities provide safe drinking water or wastewater treatment, as well as how they can help protect local water sources, reduce the need for complex and costly treatment, and ensure sufficient water supplies through conservation.
- Utilities can build closer, more cooperative relationships with environmental and public-interest groups if they help plan, have an exhibit, or participate in special activities and ceremonies.
- Other departments within your city or town—human resources, finance committee, capital improvement committee, and conservation commission, for example—will learn about your utility’s equipment, personnel, and financial demands.
- Building cooperative relationships allows for more understanding in advance of an unexpected negative event such as a sewer backup, an odor complaint, or a boil water order. This is particularly important in an era of stretched finances.

Our Open House Toolkit can help you to organize and carry out a smooth-running and successful open house.



10 Steps to Success

- 1 Plan early
- 2 Assemble your team
- 3 Set your budget
- 4 Pick a Date
- 5 Create a Master Itinerary
- 6 Plan fun activities
- 7 Promote the Open House
- 8 Debrief with your staff after the event
- 9 Send thank you notes to dignitaries that participated
- 10 Issue a press release after the event to media that did not attend



Choose a Date

- Select the date of your open house, preferably on a weekday night or a weekend to attract more visitors.
- Make sure that the date does not conflict with other major events in your community that could draw visitors and the media away from your open house.
- Make the date known early throughout the community so other major events will not be planned on that day.

Create an Agenda

- Appoint a project manager to serve as the point person for the Open House.
- Outline a tentative agenda for the various activities you would like to include as part of your open house. (See Possible Open House Activities for ideas.)
- Determine the location and time for each event, activity, and exhibit.
- Assign a staff member to coordinate each event, activity, or exhibit.
- Prepare special name badges for all persons who will be “on duty” during the open house
- Once you estimate the number of persons you will need to arrange and carry out all your proposed activities, decide if your available staff is sufficient or if you need to recruit additional outside volunteers such as family members of utility personnel or others within your personal and professional networks. (Note: Only members of your utility’s staff should be assigned to conduct tours, give demonstrations, or explain exhibits, since these tasks require specialized knowledge and insight.
- Prepare an outline of key points that should be covered during tours, exhibits, and demonstrations; rehearse with persons assigned to these activities and make sure they speak in lay person’s terms and avoid using technical words.

Be sure your entire plant is neat, clean, and polished before the open house

Create an Agenda (cont.)

- Check the tour route, displays, and exhibits carefully to eliminate safety hazards.
- Provide safety gear, if applicable.
- Assign plant personnel to continuously monitor potentially hazardous areas during the entire open house.
- Decide if refreshments will be served—what kind, where, how many, when, and how to pay for them—and explore sponsorship opportunities as necessary.
- Determine what exhibits or displays you would like to set up for the open house. Select “hands-on” exhibits, displays, and activities that will get visitors involved—something to see or do—such as slides in a laboratory microscope to examine. Solicit outside partner organizations to provide exhibits and/or displays as needed.
- **Be sure your entire plant is neat, clean, and polished before the open house. Schedule time for staff to prepare the plant prior to the event.**

Other Details

- Designate specific areas for visitor parking and assign traffic guides to parking lots on the day of the open house.
- Make arrangements with local police departments for traffic control on the day of the open house.
- Make and post direction signs to the open house around your community.
- Assign a staff person or resource person, if available, to photograph key activities; have photo release forms available to obtain signatures of persons in the photographs. (See the Resources section for a sample photo release form.)
- Prepare special name badges for all persons who will be “on duty” during the open house.



For an open house to be a truly effective part of your outreach program, you want to attract as many local residents as possible.

Actively promote your open house by using a few of the ideas listed below. Note that some of these ideas are appropriate only if your utility has sponsored certain other activities during the month, such as poster contests or water fairs.

Publicity

- Feature the details of your open house at least six weeks in advance of the event (the earlier the better!)
- Issue a general press release about the open house to all news media about a month in advance; send the key details about specific events to the calendar sections of newspapers, local cable stations, and radio (check the deadlines with each media outlet).(See link to sample press release in Resources section.)
- Issue a detailed news release including a complete schedule of events about 10 days before the open house.

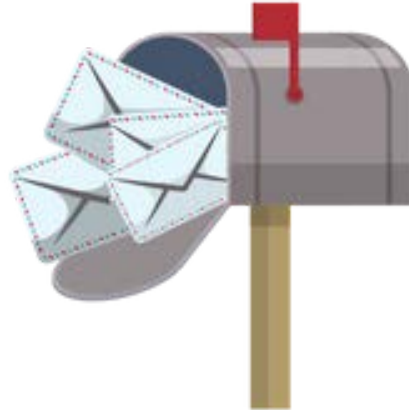
Publicity (cont.)

- Send a public service announcement, giving the key facts about your open house to local radio, television, and cable stations about a month in advance of the event.
- Send a photograph with a caption of workers sprucing up the plant, or representatives of your utility and participating community organizations setting up exhibits for the open house to local newspapers.
- Make follow-up phone calls to all news media within a week before the event to answer questions, and to give updates on open house arrangements and activities.
- Prepare and place posters about the open house in highly visible and well-travelled locations throughout the community, such as the reception area of your utility's office, lobby of municipal buildings, libraries, shopping malls, banks, and community centers. Create a digital flyer to email (or an email with event details).
- Post signs about the open house on main roads in the vicinity of the treatment plant.
- Post details about the open house on your web site and social media.
- Use email and social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) to promote the event.



Special Invitations

- Reach out to your local legislators (state representative, state senator) and your federal elected officials and make them a part of the event. They often like to present citations to utilities.
- Send a special invitation letter to the open house to community, civic, and political leaders (select persons, city council members); representatives of all area media; local organizations; environmental and public-interest groups; schools; and other key institutions. Be creative: There is often a merit badge or other award that members of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts can work on, and a tour of the facility can meet many of the award requirements. Connect with local school teachers and offer them help with presenting environmental content in their science classes; offer resource to give to students.
- Send special invitation letters to the families of all utility employees.
- Encourage utility employees to compile their own guest lists and personally sign special invitation letters to these persons.
- Send copies of news releases about the open house to all local civic and community organizations with a note asking that the information be published in newsletters and announced at meetings.



Special Display and Recognition

- Position your open house as the “grand finale” of your public outreach program.
- Display all school contest entries (posters, essays, and water fair exhibits).
- Announce and present prizes to school contest winners.
- **Be sure that participating schools are notified that all contest entries will be displayed.**
Such displays are bound to be a drawing card for participating students and teachers—as well as their families, relatives, and friends.
- Present Certificates of Appreciation to volunteers or those who supported your open house. Make sure that all persons being recognized are formally invited well in advance. These presentations will also increase attendance at your open house.
- **Be sure to emphasize these special displays** and recognition activities in all publicity about your open house.





Include organized plant tours as a primary activity at the open house. Organized tours will make the day more interesting and educational for visitors and will facilitate “crowd control.”

Possible Open House Activities

- Hold a water-tapping or water-drilling demonstration.
- Dedicate other exhibits to adult visitors, such as swimming pool maintenance, and water-wise lawn and garden care (two particularly timely topics in early May).
- Hold a “dunking contest” to raise money for prizes for contest winners or for scholarships for local high school students interested in pursuing careers in water-related fields; invite community leaders, political figures, media representatives, and, if possible, area celebrities to be “dunked.”
- Set up exhibits that convey messages especially significant to your particular utility. For example, if you want to dramatize to your customers what a “bargain” drinking water is, set up a comparison of how much you pay for a gallon of your water compared to a gallon of bottled water.

Possible Open House Activities (cont.)

- Feature exhibits or displays related to drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater:
 - Demonstrations of monitoring and testing procedures performed regularly on the community's water supply to protect public health and safety.
 - Displays showing how your utility protects water sources and treats contaminated water.
 - Displays explaining how consumers can conserve water at home, at work, or in the community; or prevent ground-water contamination through the proper disposal of household hazardous waste. Offer a raffle for related products such as low-flow shower heads or shower timers.
 - An exhibit explaining your utility's wellhead protection program to point out the extensive effort required to safeguard the community's groundwater supplies.
- Make snow-cones from water produced at the treatment plant and serve to visitors at the open house.
- If your facility makes compost or has access to good, stable, mature, biosolids compost, have a planting station to re-pot flats of marigolds. (In addition to being fun it teaches that wastewater treatment is true recycling and emphasizes the nutrient cycle (much like the water cycle) and the fact that waste is a resource if handled correctly.
- Have a coloring station with printed coloring pages and crayons.



Possible Open House Activities (cont.)

- Distribute simple pamphlets or handouts:
 - Hints for wise-water use throughout the home and in the lawn and garden
 - How to read a water meter
 - The water cycle
 - Water emergency procedures
 - Bookmarks and door hangers
- Hold a guessing contest for visitors to estimate:
 - How many gallons were treated at the plant during the previous month
 - How many gallons will leak from a dripping faucet in a single 24-hour day (set up a “dripping faucet” display with a barrel to catch the dripping water)
- Arrange special activities for youngsters, such as face painting, puppet shows, or theater performances with water messages, or appearances by clowns or other water-related costumed characters who will talk about “water-wise” habits.
- Give various promotional items to the first 100 attendees or “door-prize” winners.
- Show videos such as “Water You Waiting For?” <https://www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/water-you-waiting>



checklist

High Level Planning: 4-6 Months Ahead of Event (start your planning as early as possible!)	Person assigned to Task	Date Due	Completed
Establish goals and objectives for your Open House			
Select date			
Recruit employees at your utility to be on the Open House Planning Committee			
Identify location for Open House (treatment plant, DPW facility, etc.)			
Develop Open House master itinerary (agenda and activities you would like to include)			
Get cost estimates (food & beverages, equipment rental, giveaways, contest prizes, etc.) and create a budget			
Create a publicity plan: Ensure staff and/or volunteers are identified to manage specific tasks – i.e., tours, displays, media relations, VIP coordination, printed material design & printing coordination, signage, online /social media, etc.			
Identify and confirm speakers/presenters (if applicable)			
Identify and contact sponsors/partners (if applicable)			
Develop a list of invitees, including town officials and departments, local businesses, and local schools; identify form of outreach (email addresses, phone)			
Other tasks:			
3-4 Months Ahead of Event	Person assigned to Task	Date Due	Completed
Plan hands-on displays			
Prepare pamphlets or handouts			
Venue/logistics planning: Will any maintenance need to be done at the treatment plant or DPW facility in advance of the event?)			
Investigate necessary permits, licenses, insurance, etc.			
Determine and arrange all details re: food (if serving), A/V equipment, parking, signage, etc.			
Review necessary safety gear with the treatment plant manager			
Order promo items/giveaways (i.e., water bottles, magnets, grease cans, etc.)			
Develop draft program for the day			
Create draft event script (i.e., MC, speaker introductions, thanks, closing, etc.)			
Request logos from corporate sponsors for online and printed materials (if applicable)			
Develop publicity pieces (i.e., newsletter articles and/or ads, radio spots, print blog posts, and articles for submission to other publications, ads, etc.)			
Develop media list & prepare news release, media advisory, background materials and all media kit materials (e.g., speaker info, photos, etc.)			
Create an event page on your website			

checklist

Email event details to customers or through community email lists			
Create a Facebook event page			
Develop a promo video and post on YouTube and your Facebook page			
Register your event on a variety of online event calendars			
Create some buzz on community blogs or forums through guest posting			
Determine VIPs (federal and state legislators, town officials) and create invitation & tracking document (i.e., spreadsheet)			
Other tasks:			
2 months prior to event	Person assigned to Task	Date Due	Completed
Send reminders to contact list re: participation			
Follow up with presenters/speakers (get their bios/copies of their presentation) (if applicable)			
Sponsorship: Follow up to confirm sponsorships and underwriting (if applicable)			
Release press announcements about keynote speakers, VIPs attending, contest winners, etc.			
Post your initial event news release on your website and circulate to all partners, affiliated organizations, etc.			
Other Tasks:			
1 week ahead	Person assigned to Task	Date Due	Completed
Have all Event Committee members meet and confirm all details against Master Itinerary – and ensure back-up plans are developed for any situation (i.e., back-up volunteers as VIP greeters, additional volunteers for registration or set-up, etc.)			
Finalize event script			
Brief any/all hosts, greeters, volunteers about their event duties and timelines			
Provide final registration numbers to caterer (if applicable)			
Determine photo op and interview opportunities with any presenters, VIPs etc. and confirm details with interviewee and media			
Other Tasks:			
1 day ahead	Person assigned to Task	Date Due	Completed
Confirm media attending			
Ensure all signage is in place			
Ensure facility is clean and setup is completed (chairs, microphone, AV equipment)			
Ensure registration and media tables are prepared and stocked with necessary items (e.g., blank name badges, paper, pens, tape, stapler, etc.)			

checklist

Ensure all promo items, gifts, plaques, trophies, etc. are on-site			
Other Tasks:			
Event day	Person assigned to Task	Date Due	Completed
Ensure you have copies of all instructions, directions, phone numbers, keys, and guest lists with you			
Check-in with each employee who is doing a tour or manning an exhibit to make sure they are all set			
Other Tasks:			
Immediately following event	Person assigned to Task	Date Due	Completed
Financial status: gather all receipts, documentation, final registration data, etc. and update budget			
Send thank-you and acknowledgement letters; be sure to remind the recipients of the event's success and how they contributed (i.e., awareness raised - number of participants, etc.).			
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsors (if applicable)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers			
<input type="checkbox"/> Speakers/presenters			
<input type="checkbox"/> VIPs			
<input type="checkbox"/> Media			
Debrief with your Open House Committee Members and write down what worked and what didn't so you can refer back next year when you are planning your next Open House			
Reach out to event participants – thank them for participating and promote your ongoing programs and how they can support your utility throughout the year			
Conduct a post-event survey – to learn what people enjoyed about your event, and where you have room to improve.			
Other Tasks:			

Helpful tools

<http://thevalueofwater.org/>

Possible activities to promote learning and fun at your event

1. How Much Water do you Use?

- https://groundwaterorg.presencehost.net/file_download/inline/7265455c-5cd6-45b1-8969-994d3eea0e52
- Summary: Audience will learn how much water they use in a day and how to reduce the amount of water used over time.
- Intended audience: This activity can be adapted for many age groups and settings.
- Duration: 20 minutes



2. Water Cycle Boogie

- <https://www.songsforteaching.com/bananaslugstringband/watercycleboogie.htm>
- Summary: Teach learners about the water cycle through song and dance
- Intended audience: Intended for kids but fun for everyone
- Duration: 5–10 minutes

3. Water Purification

- https://groundwaterorg.presencehost.net/file_download/inline/324f582c-9de6-4a08-a55c-b3d603c430c1
- Summary: Learners will compare modern water treatment methods to the methods of the pioneers
- Intended audience: Grades 4–8
- Duration: 30 minutes (compliments a tour of a water treatment facility)



Wastewater:

- <http://www.mwra.state.ma.us/publications/what-you-flush-matters/what-you-flush-matters.pdf>

photo and press release examples

Imagine a Day Without Water Event at Cobble Mountain Reservoir

October 12, 2017

Contact: Jaimye Bartak, AICP

Public Communications Manager

Springfield Water and Sewer Commission

250 M Street Extension

Agawam, MA 01001

413-452-1302 (t)

413-835-1942 (m)

jaimye.bartak@waterandsewer.org

<http://waterandsewer.org/>

In the 1930s, Cobble Mountain Reservoir, located in the hills of Granville and Blanford, was built to serve the booming City of Springfield 20 miles away. At the time, people traveled from abroad to view what was then the tallest earthen dam ever built, and a modern engineering marvel. These days, Cobble Reservoir still serves the Springfield region as its primary water supply, but is closed off to most public access, making it both far removed yet intricately intertwined with everyday city life in the valley below.

The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission, which owns and maintains the reservoir, viewed *Imagine a Day Without Water* on October 12 as an excellent opportunity to link this faraway, critical resource with the current economic revitalization occurring in the Springfield region. The Commission partnered with Mayor Sarno of the City of Springfield to recruit representatives from Springfield's most prominent businesses and agencies – including Eastman-Solutia Chemical Company, Baystate Health, MGM Springfield, and the fire department – to participate in a media event at the reservoir. Not only did this diverse array of speakers help illustrate how all sectors of the economy depend on clean, reliable water, it also generated a unified message in the call for more investment in water infrastructure.

After driving several miles from the city towards the reservoir, the mayor, participants, and news media caravanned up a last few miles of dirt road through thick woods to the event. After Mayor Sarno declared that “Springfield has the best water the country,” the message from the Commission and the other participants was clear and emphatic: Without this water, development in Springfield stops. Patient care ceases. Production is halted. Houses burn. All speakers called on federal and state officials, as well as voters, to recognize the critical urgency in investing in the pipes and treatment plants that bring clean water from a quiet lake in the mountains to city businesses and homes. Infrastructure was the message, but the stunning natural backdrop of Cobble Reservoir served as an eye-catching – if unlikely – backdrop for a media audience used to daily news photos featuring construction cranes and traffic cones. Students from Zanetti Montessori School's after-school robotics club, who attended somewhat last-minute as part of their project working on water sector issues, also added a fun element to the day. After the speakers finished, the students presented on the importance of water to their daily lives, while Mayor Sarno took the opportunity of their presence to remind younger audiences of the fulfilling job opportunities available in the water sector. Reporters from Channel 22 News and WMAC radio covered the entire event, adding another update in a line of recent regional media stories about the visits by the Commission's executive director, Josh Schimmel, to the White House to advocate for water infrastructure investment. Overall, the Imagine a Day Without Water event generated positive press about the need for water infrastructure, while also educating area residents about their water supply and the diversity of uses and users that depend on it.



CITY OF CONCORD

General Services Department

Press Release

March 13, 2019



For Immediate Release

Concord General Services
311 North State Street, Concord, NH 03301
generalservices@concordnh.gov
603-228-2737

World Water Day: Sustainable Wastewater Systems

CONCORD — March 22, 2019 is World Water Day, a United Nations initiative to celebrate water and advocate for sustainable management of resources. The City of Concord invites the community to get involved by learning more about wastewater.

Wastewater is used water. It's the water after you wash your hands, brush your teeth, take a shower, do laundry, wash dishes, or flush the toilet. What happens to water after it is used? Where does it go? For developing countries and low-income areas, wastewater is often directly discharged into the closest surface water drain with very little to no treatment. Approximately 80% of wastewater worldwide (from homes, cities, industry, and agriculture) flows back into nature without being treated or reused. Untreated wastewater can pollute the environment with negative impacts to public health and local wildlife. For developed countries and high-income areas, sewer collection systems and wastewater treatment facilities operate to collect wastewater from residential, commercial, and industrial properties to be treated according to federal and local standards before being returned to a nearby body of water.

In Concord, there are approximately 9,400 connections to the City's sanitary sewer system. Roughly 168 miles of underground pipe stretch across the city to collect wastewater and transport it either the Penacook Wastewater Treatment Facility or the Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Facility. On average, 4.3 million gallons of wastewater are processed daily to protect Concord's public health and the local environment. The reclaimed water is properly disinfected, tested regularly for quality standards, and recovered safely back into the Merrimack River. The Merrimack River used to be one of the most polluted rivers in the country until the Clean Water

CITY OF CONCORD

General Services Department

Act strengthened standards in 1972 for discharge pollutants and surface water quality. The Penacook Wastewater Treatment Facility was built a year later, and the Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Facility was built shortly after that in 1979. The City's investments for sustainable wastewater management has since improved the quality of the Merrimack River and protected local ecosystems.

In celebration of World Water Day, Concord residents are invited to join Concord General Services on March 22nd for an open house of their Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Facility. Stop by the administration building at 125 Hall Street any time between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. for a facility tour and a walk-through of the treatment process. Attendees should be advised that odor emissions have reduced significantly over the years through past facility improvements, but some odors are still present due to the natural treatment process. For any questions about the open house, please send an email to generalservices@concordnh.gov or call (603) 228-2737. Visit www.concordnh.gov/wastewater to learn more about Concord's wastewater treatment.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 19-007

January 31, 2019

Contact: depressooffice@dep.nyc.gov; (718) 595-6600

Newtown Creek Wastewater Resource Recovery Facility to Host Annual Valentine's Day Tours

Space is Limited and [Reservations](#) are Required

Photos are Available on [DEP's Flickr Page](#)

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today announced that the Newtown Creek Wastewater Resource Recovery Facility will once again be opened to the public for special Valentine's Day tours. Tours will be held on Saturday, February 9 at 11am., 1pm, 3pm, and 5pm and will include a short overview of the wastewater treatment process followed by a visit to the 120-foot high observation deck located atop the iconic digester eggs. There, visitors will enjoy scenic views of the New York City skyline. **Reservations** are required and will be taken on a first come, first served basis beginning Thursday, January 31 at 12pm. The tours will begin at the Visitors Center, which is located at 329 Greenpoint Avenue.

Located in Brooklyn's Greenpoint neighborhood, the Newtown Creek plant went into operation in 1967 and serves approximately 1 million residents in a drainage area of more than 15,000 acres (25 square miles), including portions of Manhattan, western Queens and northern Brooklyn. The plant is the City's largest wastewater resource recovery facility, recently underwent a \$5 billion upgrade and has been honored by The New York City Public Design Commission with two Awards for Excellence in Design.

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing approximately 1 billion gallons of high quality drinking water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8.6 million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,500 miles of sewer lines and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$19.4 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).



photo and press release examples

Sample Media Invitation:

Massachusetts Water Works Association
PO Box 1064
Acton, MA 01720
978-263-1388

Date of Issuance: September 11, 2017

Contacts: Jennifer Pederson, Executive Director
Massachusetts Water Works Association
Office: 978-263-1388; Mobile: 978-844-2294

Media Invitation

Not for Public Distribution



You're invited to a media tour on Thursday, October 5, 2017 at 10 AM

Imagine: No water to drink, or even to make coffee with. No water to shower, flush the toilet, or do laundry. Hospitals would close without water. Firefighters couldn't put out fires and farmers couldn't water their crops.

Some communities in America already know how impossible it is to go a day without our most precious resource: Water. Here in Massachusetts, it is easy to take access to clean reliable water for granted, but there is more to the story of our drinking water. Join us in Worcester to learn more about where water comes from, how it is treated and how it makes its way to customers.

Massachusetts Water Works Association is participating in "Imagine a Day without Water," a national effort to raise awareness and educate the public about the challenges facing water and wastewater systems and the need for infrastructure investment.

When: Thursday, October 5, 2017 – 10 AM

Where: Robert Moylan Water Filtration Plant, 71 Stonehouse Hill Road, Holden, MA 01520

Appropriate footwear for walking on uneven ground and in unpaved areas should be worn. Safety equipment will be provided.

Please RSVP to Jennifer Pederson at jpедerson@masswaterworks.org or 978-263-1388 prior to the event.