



Control Number: 50664



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VTX1 Companies
Connecting You Since '52!

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PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
FILING CLERK

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Chief Human Resource Officer

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March 18, 2020
Central Records Filing Clerk
Public Utility Commission of Texas
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Project No. 50664; *Issues Related to the State of Disaster for the Coronavirus Disease 2019*

Dear Filing Clerk:

In response to the Public Utility Commission of Texas' (Commission) request for interested parties to inform the Commission of initiatives related to COVID-19, I am writing to provide a summary of initiatives that Valley Telephone Cooperative, Inc. (VTCI or Cooperative) has taken thus far. While this is a rapidly evolving situation that may require further action, VTCI continues to monitor the outbreak of COVID-19 and evaluate business practices to protect customers and employees so that we can continue to provide reliable critical telecommunications services to the communities, in which we live.

During this time when employers are encouraging employees to work from home and government officials at all levels are encouraging citizens to exercise social distancing tactics to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, VTCI is cognizant of the uniquely important role that it plays as a telecommunications provider in keeping our members connected. Thanks to the advanced telecommunications network VTCI and its affiliates operate, customers across our rural service territory can practice the recommended social distancing by working remotely, accessing remote or distance learning tools for their families, engaging in online commerce to obtain the supplies they need, and/or utilizing telemedicine resources. Due to our important role during this crisis, VTCI is taking appropriate precautions to ensure that it is able to supply critical services to customers for the duration of this emergency.

On March 16, 2020, VTCI issued an e-mail to all employees informing them that the Cooperative was enforcing the guidelines adopted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) related to self-quarantine for anyone who reasonably believes that they may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus for a 14-day period. VTCI also ordered additional hygiene supplies for all offices in accordance with the Cooperative's pandemic plan. VTCI requested that any employees inform supervisors of any illnesses and encouraged employees to exercise best practices for decreasing the spread of bacteria and/or viruses including, but not limited to, staying at home if sick, washing hands regularly, and other precautionary actions consistent with the Cooperative's pandemic plan and current CDC and World Health Organization guidelines.

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VTCL has informed the Commission of those actions with the publication of this letter.

On March 18, 2020, VTCL provided the attached COVID-19 Press Release to the public outlining further measures that the Cooperative is implementing to ensure its ability to continue to provide critical services to our customers in a responsible manner. To the extent necessary, VTCL may issue additional press releases in the future as we attempt to assist our communities.

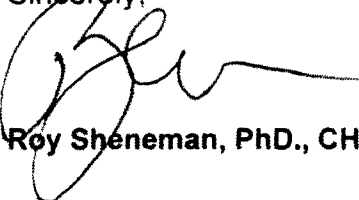
VTCL has further informed its national association, NTCA, the Rural Broadband Association, that it was participating in the Federal Communications Commission's Keep Americans Connected Pledge. Under such pledge, VTCL will not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eastex has also pledged to waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In regard to opening Wi-Fi hotspots, Eastex does not currently operate any Wi-Fi hotspots but is working with local officials and schools to see if we can offer such assistance.

On March 17, 2020, VTCL participated in a conference call with other members of the Texas Telephone Association (TTA) to discuss TTA activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The undersigned serves as the chairman of the TTA Regulatory Committee. During that meeting, TTA provided critical information to members related to recent actions taken by the Commission during the emergency Open Meeting held on March 16, 2020 and asked members to keep the Commission informed on any actions taken in response to the COVID-19 virus by filing updates in the above-referenced project through the Commission's E-File system. TTA continues to work with Commission Staff to share further information and direction from the Commission to its members on an ongoing basis.

Also, on March 17, 2020, due to suspected cases of COVID-19 in VTCL's service area, VTCL closed the lobbies of its business offices to foot traffic and is asking customers to transact business through the Cooperative's drive-thru windows, via telephone, or online.

In addition to the above, VTCL is reaching out to local schools and leaders to explore initiatives to increase student connectivity and allow greater access to distance learning. VTCL is proactively exploring service promotions and other ways in which its network can be harnessed to increase connectivity for students, teachers, and others throughout its territory. We will provide a subsequent update on these efforts. VTCL continues to monitor governmental agencies' websites including the Governor's Office, the Texas Department of State Health Services, the CDC, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Commission, and will take further actions, as appropriate, to protect our customers and our employees. Eastex appreciates the diligent manner and approach taken by the PUC of Texas in helping assure continued services to our public and private interests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roy Sheneman", written over a horizontal line.

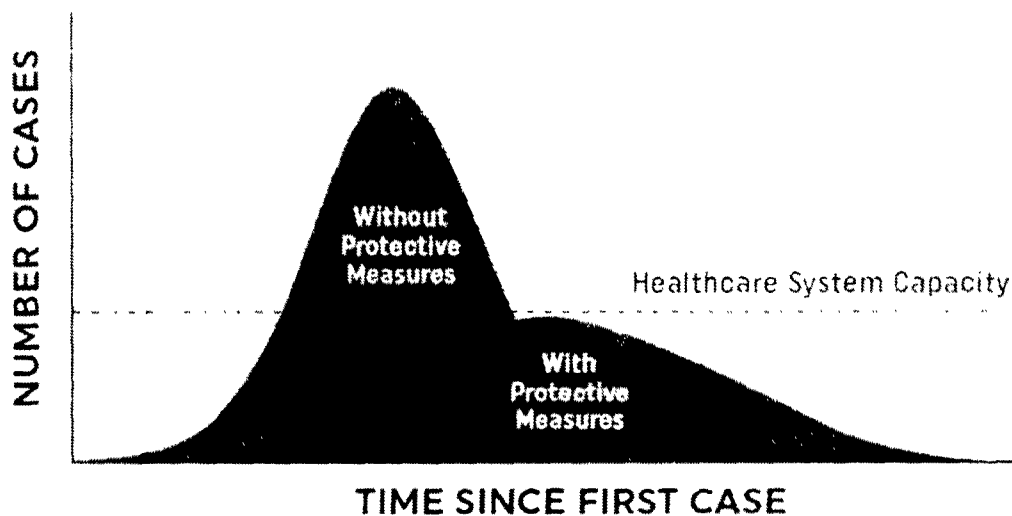
Roy Sheneman, PhD., CHRO

COVID-19 Press Release

VTX1 Companies takes steps to protect against COVID-19

At VTX1 Companies, we value the health and safety of our customers and co-op members above all else, which is why we are closely monitoring events concerning COVID-19 (coronavirus). We are fortunate that, as of yet, our area has not had any confirmed reported cases of COVID-19. But it is still important for all of us to do our part to prevent the spread of the virus.

While taking protective measures may not prevent people from getting the virus, it can help reduce the number of patients our health care system must treat in a short period of time. As the graph below shows, taking measures to protect against COVID-19 can spread the number of cases across a longer period, ensuring that health care providers have the resources to help everyone who needs it.



With that in mind, VTX1 Companies is taking the following steps, in accordance with CDC guidelines, to protect both our employees and our customers and co-op members:

- VTX1 Companies employees who feel sick are being instructed to stay home.
- We are directing employees to cancel any work-related flights and to reschedule any work trips.

- Those who can work from home are encouraged to do so.
- Employees who work directly with customers and co-op members should avoid shaking hands or making any physical contact.
- We will be providing additional disinfectant products to employees in the office and posting additional reminders for employees to wash their hands often.
- All employees are asked to take proper precautions to ensure the safety of themselves and those around them.

VTX1 Companies also offers a variety of online services to help you pay your bill and conduct other utility business from home. In addition, we encourage all of our customers and co-op members to take similar steps to protect themselves and their families:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Put distance between yourself and other people where possible.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough, or use the inside of your elbow.
- If you are sick, wear a face mask around other people. If you are not sick or caring for someone who is, you do not need a face mask, and they should be saved for caregivers.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, handles, phones and keyboards daily.

We will continue to monitor this situation closely and explore further measures to support our customers and co-op members and the community as needed. Follow us on social media for updates and visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov for more information about COVID-19.