

Survey: Small water systems feel financial effects of pandemic

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Drinking water providers are seeing a financial hit during the pandemic, according to a new state survey of water agencies.

The [State Water Resources Control Board's survey](#) found that while shutoffs of water service have been rare, in line with Gov. Gavin Newsom's [executive order putting a moratorium on shutoffs](#) during the pandemic, water systems are worried about nonpayment and how they'll address delinquent accounts once the moratorium expires.

Of 64 drinking water systems that responded to the agency's survey, nine systems reported revenue losses of more than 10 percent, while 12 said they were running short of critical equipment or chemicals, and seven said personnel shortages were affecting operations.

Small water systems reported being particularly hard-hit, with two of them reporting revenue losses above 20 percent.

The board said it received reports of only 12 illegal water service shutoffs between mid-April and May and that no shutoffs have been reported since then. Advocates for access to clean drinking water said they were relieved that shutoffs have been scarce, but that they were worried about what will happen after the public health emergency ends, as well as how small, rural water systems that were [already struggling to maintain their systems](#) will fare.

"Our biggest concern is when the moratorium is lifted, we'll see a wave of shutoffs," said Michael Claiborne, an attorney with the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability. He said the group would likely seek legislation next year setting up long-term payment plans and protections for low-income households.