



WAPA COVID-19 sustaining network operations.

Paul Colmer 24th March 2020

Following the presidential address last night and the upcoming lockdown on Thursday WAPA intends to support all members in maintaining their business and clients during this time.

This document is advised policy and will be amended daily to keep in line with governmental policy as it rolls out.

Scope

To advise on best practice to minimise person to person contact and safety and hygiene procedures while carrying out essential services to keep clients connected during the lockdown period.

Pre Thursday tasks.

As all staff will be stationed and working from home we advise that that immediate action is taken prior to Thursday lockdown on the matters listed below.

Security

Globally and within South Africa we have a high cyber crime rate and sadly the criminal element will take advantage of the crisis. It is advised that a member of staff is appointed to update all laptops and BYOD devices to be used at home on company network and servers with the latest version of antivirus / malware software. Once completed a deep scan must be executed. Make use of VPN and cloud firewalls with strict policies. Employees often work in teams,

and that can mean using collaboration tools like messaging platforms and video-meeting rooms. Make sure all platforms are management approved and policy set to only use these platforms. If a tool isn't working right, staff might be tempted to download a substitute. Don't let them do it. You could inadvertently introduce a software program with a security flaw — and that means someone unauthorized may be able to access company data, or any personal data you have on that device. Cybercriminals are exploiting the coronavirus outbreak to send fake emails with dangerous links to employees. Here's how it works. The email messages may appear to come from company officials and might ask you to open a link to a new company policy related to the coronavirus. If you click on the attachment or imbedded link, you're likely to download malware onto your device. Advise staff to don't click. Instead, immediately report the phishing attempt to their employer.

In light of the above, sales staff working at home should be contacting existing clients and advising on security VPN and firewalling during the crisis. As this can be deployed as a 'no human contact service sale' it represents an opportunity in boost cash flow in troubled times.

Travel plans

The current situation will require some of your staff to travel to clients, data centres and high sites for fault resolution on critical services. There will be some sort of pass required for these staff and WAPA has already submitted member names but we are not sure as to whether the passes will be under WAPA or individual company names. A template has already been submitted for a WAPA COVID-19 work access permit. We also do not have information on how the policing of these passes will be carried out by SADF and SAP. We will keep you updated as it unfolds. Irrespective of the process of these

passes, field staff will require company ID cards with photo and hotline number. These need to be created now!

Note; Please make use of the Teraco ' Remote hands service '

Supply chain

This is a critical part of maintaining your networks and we are working with vendors to keep a stores desk open for the collection of critical network components. We are also investigating whether or not courier companies will be able to get passes to facilitate delivery of such components.

High site faults

If the necessity arises to visit a high site, best practices are to be adhered to, under no circumstances should a technician climb a high site alone as risk far exceeds the risk of infection of COVID -19 from a technician partner.

Critical client visits

If a visit to a client is deemed necessary then the following precautions should be adhered to protect both the client and your staff. Maintain a good physical distance from the client and request the client does not breach this. Technician to use disposable gloves and mask during the visit. If equipment or CPE is required to be installed has been unboxed for pre installation programming , the device must be sanitized before install. On completion of install and prior to entering the vehicle to leave the technician must sanitize all tools used in the installation including laptop and cell phone if they formed part of the process . Normal hand sanitation to be carried out after removal of gloves.

New clients

I have spoken to many WAPA members and the general consensus is that most are cancelling new installs that are deemed non critical and this applies to faults and maintenance. Having run a large ISP I know that there are many service calls relating to WiFi coverage within the home and suspect this will increase with the lockdown. We will see the call that says 'I've set up my home office in my spare bedroom and the WiFi don't work' I see this to be none critical and would tell them to move to a better part of the house or get a long Ethernet cable. If a client requests a new service then I believe it should be accompanied by a letter of motivation as to why the install is critical.

Network congestion

We have seen from overseas and the WISP groups that I am a member of there that there has been a surge in network traffic after lockdown. Measures being implemented include media streaming companies to restrict 4k and HD programming and WISP's can take the appropriate action of throttling bit torrents and shaping their networks accordingly. As in my previous correspondence to members cheap IP transit is available if your pipes start to fill.

Bad debt

In my conversations with overseas WISP's we are also seeing an increase in bad debt from clients, one provider indicated 35% increase. At a time where all WISPs are going feel the pinch this is not good news so the question really is "should I suspend clients for none payment during this period"? My advice here to you and only

my personal opinion is that you should not suspend but throttle down their service still allowing basic access. We don't want to be in a situation where clients use the excuse that we have all heard many times 'how can I pay you when you cut me off from my bank '.

Conclusions

As said before this document will be updated daily as things unfold and any legislation changes are implemented. It is indeed a time for us to drop our badges and unite just as WISP's to service our communities.

WAPA has your back and we are doing our utmost to assist you and most of all please be safe in these troubled times.

Paul Colmer

WAPA executive committee