

WHAT'S ON TAP



NEWS FOR DC WATER CUSTOMERS • VOLUME 19 ISSUE 2



Successful system conversion benefits everyone

Utilities rely on a Customer Information System (CIS) for billing, work order management, customer service assistance and other functions.

Changing to a new CIS is one of the biggest projects a utility can undertake. DC Water completed the conversion on time and on budget while also creating a new customer web portal, mobile app, payment application, work management system and dispatching system.

DC Water accomplished all of this in just 12 months, and encountered very few problems. This success was due to pre-planning, lots of testing and validating, and an incredible team of dedicated staff.

The final conversion took place in December. Now, DC Water has more data that is better integrated, enabling Customer Care Associates to analyze accounts and resolve problems for customers.

We can also flag water bills above a certain amount to be reviewed more carefully by a person before being sent to the customer. This should help DC Water address more high-usage bills before the customer even sees it – with an early explanation and payment options included—rather than after a complaint is received.

In addition, we improved the process for meter readings in the cases where DC Water is not receiving data from customers' meters. Estimates are now more precise and more reliable.

The previous CIS relied on older computer coding, so changes to the system were costly and time-consuming. The new CIS can be modified quickly at less cost. Additionally, the contract includes two upgrades per year to keep the system up-to-date.

The new CIS connects information from many departments. For instance, the field crews enter their work order information into laptops while in the field. This uploads in real-time and the information is available to customer service and emergency center staff, resulting in better coordination and customer assistance.

General Manager's Message

During the cold snap in January, when the rest of us bundled up to keep warm and hurried inside, the men and women who repair water mains in the District bundled up and went outside to work. At times, the wind chill factor was five below zero.



Can you imagine? Cold water streaming from a broken pipe, and you are trying to locate the break, dig to the main and find the correct valve? For dozens of men and women at DC Water, this is their life's work and each call is a brand new mission, racing the clock and the conditions to return water service to customers.

Over the course of 11 days, our teams worked night and day repairing more than 150 broken water mains and service lines. For perspective, DC Water averages 400 water main breaks in a year. We prioritized the repairs. For some mains, we could reduce the water flow and return later, while we fixed the ones that spewed water everywhere. We appreciate the patience of the public. Please know that we got to them as fast as we could. We also appreciate being alerted by residents to potential pipe breaks — you are a great asset when we are facing severe weather. Please continue to report suspected main breaks by calling (202) 612-3400.

Please read the accompanying article on page two of this newsletter.

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continued



DC Water staff step up in cold weather emergencies

The recent cold snap caused havoc across the region. No one knows that better than Andre Carter, who toiled in the cold, wind and dark, for up to 16 hours at a time, repairing water mains and service lines. Yet, his attitude might be surprising. "This time of year is playoff time for us. The level of intensity changes once a team gets to the playoffs. We have to bring the same attitude and getting the job done in this weather is like our run to the championship. At the end of the winter season we look back at what we have accomplished and it's like winning the title."

Severe drops in temperature can cause the ground to shift while at the same time, pipe materials can expand and contract with fluctuating temperatures and the colder water running through the pipes. All of these conditions weaken pipes to their breaking point.

On January 3, DC Water quickly activated its emergency plan and Incident Management Team (IMT), including

representatives from DC HSEMA and DPW. The IMT planned ahead while addressing the growing number of water emergencies. The Authority brought in more contractor crews and pulled staff from other operational areas to increase capacity. At its peak, there were 21 crews in the field at once. Everyone played a part—investigations, valves, meter shop, communications, procurement, emergency management, safety, security, and other support staff. For example, employees from the Meter Shop checked for frozen meters and Sewer Services personnel salted areas where running water had frozen.

And just when the weather turned, "A warm-up may be a relief to many," says Geneva Parker, Manager of DC Water's 24-hour Emergency Command Center. "But that is when frozen pipes start to thaw. They don't thaw evenly, and when moving water pushes against a frozen segment of pipe, customers experience pipe breaks in their homes." The Command Center fielded 4,545 calls during the same period. The majority were for water main or service line breaks and internal pipes that had frozen or broken. For more information on cold-weather water emergencies, please visit dcwater.com/cold-weather-pipes.

Spring cleaning for District pipes runs from March 26 – May 7

DC Water purchases treated drinking water from the Washington Aqueduct and distributes that water through more than 1,350 miles of pipes all the way to your home. To clean this system, the disinfectant that protects drinking water is temporarily switched every year from chloramine to chlorine. This chemical switch kills bacteria that may have built up in pipes and is a standard method used all over the country.



This year, the switch occurs March 26 through May 7. The Authority ensures water continues to meet strict standards for drinking and everyday use, though customers may notice a slight change in its taste or smell. If you notice a strong chlorine taste and odor, or temporary discoloration you can:

- Run the cold water tap for two minutes
- Refrigerate a pitcher of cold tap water to allow the chlorine odor to disappear
- Use a pitcher—or faucet—mount filter to remove chlorine taste and odor

Individuals and business owners who take special precautions to remove chloramine from tap water, such as dialysis centers, medical facilities and aquatic pet owners, should continue to take the same precautions during the temporary switch to chlorine. Most methods for removing chloramine from tap water are also effective in removing chlorine. For more information, please contact the **Drinking Water Division** at **(202) 612-3440**.

CIS *continued*

DC Water is upgrading 90,000 water meters across the District, a project scheduled to finish in August. The new meters will provide additional data for the new CIS, making it even more valuable. Customers who have questions or issues are encouraged to speak with a **Customer Care Associate** by calling **(202) 354-3600**.



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