



UP THE CREEK

March 1, 2012

Checking the calendar of annually recurring events shows a couple of things happening this month worthy of discussion. First is the cleaning of the water distribution system, which is arguably the most critical element affecting our water quality. We suspect that those of you reading this newsletter – those few who have not already pitched it into the waste basket – might be surprised to hear our collection of plumbing described as most critical. Couldn't be, compared to that almost shiny-new treatment plant that we recently paid \$1.3 million for. That must surely be the most vital cog in the USCDWUA machine.

Actually, on the basis of replacement value, the distribution system is worth ten times as much as the plant. And, while our treatment plant does produce really good water, its quality control ends when the water leaves the building. After that, it's at the mercy of the distribution system, a 105-mile network of pipes, tanks, valves, pressure reducers, air suckers, air blowers, and leaks unknown. It is certain that by the time a glass of water reaches your kitchen faucet, it is no longer the pristine product that left the treatment plant. Some days, we believe it is a wonder it gets there at all. We are fortunate that gravity at least seems to be on our side. All other forces conspire to degrade or divert the water as it navigates the maze.

The ideal operation of a perfect-world distribution system would be to have the water flow briskly throughout. It would keep the water fresh, inhibit the formation of disinfection byproducts, and, most of all, prevent sedimentation. That's the problem that requires flushing. Any solids suspended in the water, such as pipe scale, rust flakes, or soil particles slowly sink to the bottom of pipes during periods of low water flow i.e. winter.

Though harmless, this sediment buildup can cause discolored water, which is why we flush it out. This will be done starting Monday March 5th. We should be finished by Friday March 16th. You can expect to see some intermittent side effects. Water pressure may decrease or go away for periods up to 30 minutes in the most extreme case. Some of the stirred up sediment can migrate into your home plumbing, for which the cure is to flush your own system. This should be done with an outside hose at a faucet that flows plenty of water. Flush as necessary to clear the discoloration from your water. Try to recognize the difference between colored water and water with air dissolved in it. The aerated water looks milky, sounds fizzy like ginger ale, and will clear up if left standing for a few minutes. Flushing your home system will not eliminate fizzy water. Over time, trapped air will work its way out of the system.

The second annually recurring job is the beginning of meter reading. We did not read meters during the months of November-February. There is too little return on the investment of time and travel required, not to mention the problem of snow cover – assuming a normal winter, not this one. This spring we will start reading meters on Monday March 19th. The first bill you receive that is based on meter readings will be April 30th.

We spread the job of reading our meters over about eight days, typically from the 18th to the 26th of each month. We follow the same route each month, so your meter will be read on approximately the same day month to month. But, there is no guarantee that the time period between two readings will always be a “month.” Our billing software adjusts for the occasional long “month” between readings, so your bill is not made higher than it should be.

Want to get your bill by email? Send us an email request, from the address you want us to use. Send to billing@uscdwua.com.

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