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COVID-19 – Philadelphia Water Department

26-32 minutes

March 8, 2021

Virtual Rate Change Hearings

The Philadelphia Water Department filed a rate increase request on February 16, 2021.

As part of a water rate-setting process that puts a priority on transparency, there will be **four public hearings**, held virtually for COVID-19 safety:

- **Tuesday, March 16, 2021** at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.
- **Thursday, March 18,** 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Hearings will be accessible **online and by phone** and conducted in English. Anyone can attend.

To testify or submit public comment, Water Department customers or those otherwise affected by these rates and charges should follow instructions to register in advance and indicate which hearing they will attend virtually.

Zoom links, instructions for joining the hearings, and information for submitting written comments [can be found on the Rate Board website](#).

Residential Shutoff Protection Extended Until April 1, 2022

The Philadelphia Water Department is again extending a freeze on shutoffs for residential customers, protecting those account holders from losing water services until **April 2022**.

Since the start of the pandemic, more than 70,000 customers have benefitted from shutoff protection. Another 15,000 previously shut-off customers had water restored at the start of the pandemic.

What to Know:

- No shutoffs for residential customers until April 2022.
- For customers enrolled in the Tiered Assistance Program or Senior Citizen Discount program, there will be no penalties or enforcement measures until April 1, 2022.
- For customers not in these assistance programs, penalties for overdue water bills start on May 1, 2021.
- Enforcement measures, including referrals to collection agencies, will go into effect August 2, 2021.

Some non-residential accounts could face shutoff enforcement starting summer 2021, and efforts to make payment arrangements with those customers are underway.

Any customer struggling to pay should explore customer assistance options.

Philadelphia created one of the nation's first income- and hardship-based affordability programs, and ways to get help have been

expanded in response to the pandemic.

If you cannot pay: call (215) 685-6300 Monday-Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. or [find out about bill help and easy ways to pay.](#)

Questions about your bill? Need support? [Request a Call from a Water Revenue Representative →](#)

September 26, 2020

No Shutoffs Until April 1, 2021

Due to ongoing economic hardship created by the COVID-19 pandemic, [we will not shut off](#) residential customers unable to pay water bills until **April 1st, 2021.**

This latest extension overlaps with a long-established December 1st-March 31st moratorium on shutoffs implemented annually to protect vulnerable utility customers during cold-weather months. Rather than begin shutoffs in spring 2020, as the pandemic forced a statewide lockdown, the City kept the moratorium in place through the

summer and fall as a public health measure.

We have also suspended all penalties and late fees for unpaid water bills until further notice.

However, your past-due total **will continue to grow** with each missed payment.

If you cannot pay: call (215) 685-6300 Monday-Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. or [find out about bill help and easy ways to pay](#).

Questions about your bill? Need support? [Request a Call from a Water Revenue Representative →](#)

New Checklists for Plumbing Permits

We are receiving a significant number of permit requests with **incomplete information**. This can delay the permitting process and lead to a lack of required permits.

Please use our permit information guidelines to avoid future problems.

The below checklists outline the specific information needed for PWD-regulated permits:

- [Checklist: New Construction Permit](#)

- [Checklist: Existing Building Permit](#)

These files detail the **required information** for existing plumbing repairs **and** new plumbing services and laterals.

Important: If your permit information is incomplete, we cannot provide the permits.

[Questions? See Our Sept. 29 Alert for Contact Info →](#)

New AWWA Guidance for Dormant Plumbing Systems

Because of potential water quality issues in dormant buildings and buildings with reduced water use, we provided informational resources for property managers in June 2020.

The American Water Works Association (AWWA) recently released a new document on this topic.

[See AWWA's 'Responding to Water Stagnation' Guide →](#)

August 31

Shutoff Pause Extended Through September

The Water Department and Water Revenue Bureau [announced on August 26](#) that a moratorium on shutoffs for delinquent customers is extended through **September 30, 2020**. While water services will not be terminated for nonpayment, past-due balances **will continue to grow**.

If you are behind on payments: It is critical that you [apply for help](#) or call **(215) 685-6300** to set up a payment agreement before shutoffs resume. Representatives are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Because many customers need assistance, more flexibility may be available for those requesting payment agreements.

A **Special Hardship claim** submitted through our customer assistance application may help if you have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Customers who qualify can address old bills, lock in lower monthly payments, and keep water flowing.

[Learn More or Apply for Help →](#)

August 10

Delinquent Customers: Get Help Now

While shutoffs have been on hold since March, unpaid bills will continue to grow past-due balances. When shutoffs resume, you could face a large bill. The best thing to do is take steps now to avoid shutoff and other issues.

Ways to get help:

- **Apply for assistance programs**
- Note: Special hardships can make you eligible for assistance even if your income is too high!
- **Set up a payment agreement**
- Due to the number of customers in need, we've given our front line reps more flexibility. Select customers may have a lower down payment and more time to pay.

[Apply for Help →](#)

Fire Flow Test Request Process

We have implemented an interim procedure for processing the fire flow test requests from customers during the COVID-19 emergency to avoid delays in conducting fire flow tests.

Once the COVID-19 situation stabilizes and PWD & City business activities return to normal, this procedure will be revised.

[See Full Instructions →](#)

COVID-19 Rain Check Impacts

All Rain Check work is currently on hold due to City COVID-19 safety restrictions. In addition, due to revenue declines related to the pandemic, the Philadelphia Water Department has significantly reduced the Rain Check budget, resulting in some major changes to the program.

At this time, only residents who have **already**

participated in the required workshop will be considered for discounted residential green infrastructure projects.

Stay up to date: [Learn more](#) or [sign up to be notified](#) when workshops resume.

2020 Philly Fun Fishing Fest Canceled

The Philadelphia Water Department (PWD), in partnership with Schuylkill River Development Corporation (SRDC), Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PP & R), and Pa Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC), regret to announce the cancellation of FishFest 2020, due to COVID 19 guidelines for outdoor events.

We hope to see you in **September, 2021.**

July 1

Water Shutoff Protection Extended

The Philadelphia Water Department **will not shut off customers** unable to pay water bills through

August 31, 2020.

Because unpaid bills continue to grow the past-due balance, those who cannot pay should apply for help immediately.

The [Tiered Assistance Program](#) allows qualifying customers to get discounted water rates and have past-due bills removed from the collections process. Examples of customers who should apply include those who lost a job, seniors, and anyone experiencing a “special hardship.”

Customers who lost a job or have medical bills may qualify for a hardship discount. All applications are decided case-by-case.

[Apply for Help](#) →

Plumbing Permits Process

As of **June 29, 2020** the Municipal Services Building (MSB) allows in-person business transactions by appointment only. We will no longer accept payment by mail for plumbing permits.

Until further notice, requests must be submitted following the temporary process outlined in our [Plumbing Permits Update](#).

Stormwater Grant Deadline Set

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Stormwater Grants program delayed this year's grant application deadline to **September 15 at 8 a.m.**

PWD will have **\$5 million** in Stormwater Grant funding to award this fall.

[Learn How to Apply →](#)

Schedule In-Person Water Bill Payments

Customers can now [schedule an in-person appointment to make payments](#) at the Municipal Services Building (MSB). **Payments are the only in-person service available** at this time, and no walk-ins are accepted.

You must have an appointment confirmation before your arrival to the MSB.

We are processing correspondence and inquiries in a limited capacity, and in the order received.

[How to Make Appointments →](#)

June 5

Non-Emergency Construction Resumes

Infrastructure improvement projects recently resumed at approved sites. Your safety is our priority. We're following all government guidelines and use protective equipment, sanitizing procedures, and social distancing.

Contact waterinfo@phila.gov with questions. Our (215) 685-6300 hotline is open for emergencies.

[See Recent Alerts →](#)

Flushing Building Water Systems

Philadelphia and surrounding counties entered the state's "Yellow Phase" on June 5 and we urge

owners and operators of dormant buildings to **flush building water systems while closed and before reopening.**

Buildings of any size where water has not been used for more than one week may experience water quality problems. Old water sitting in pipes can create public health issues such as **Legionnaires' disease** even if water is not used for drinking or washing.

Property owners are responsible for ensuring the water in their building is safe.

[See guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and others →](#)

Plumbing Permits

We are processing all plumbing permits for new connections, repairs, service discontinuances, backflow protection, and meters.

However, until further notice, requests must be submitted following the temporary process outlined

in our [Plumbing Process Update](#).

Stormwater Grant Deadline Extended

The **Stormwater Grant deadline has been extended *beyond July 1st***. No new deadline has been selected at this time, but the Stormwater Incentives team will send updates when more budget information is available.

Pre-application meetings can now be scheduled if the project team would like to meet with Stormwater Incentives for feedback on grant applications.

[Learn More →](#)

May 20

Shutoff Protection Extended to July 10

If you are unable to pay your water bill due to economic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, you will not face shutoff through July 10, 2020.

This latest extension, first enacted in March 2020, aligns with a May 7, 2020, **Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Executive Order [shielding residents from eviction](#)**.

“The health and safety of customers is our top priority,” **says Commissioner Randy Hayman**. “Access to clean water is an essential part of public health and we are extending our temporary freeze on water shutoffs, effective through July 10, 2020.”

All account holders are still required to pay their bills and should do so if possible. Water bills fund essential infrastructure investments critical to everyday life in Philadelphia.

Those who cannot pay their bill should [apply for help](#).

May 14

Updated Water Service, Lateral Repair, and New Connection Permit Process

The following update went in to effect May 1, 2020 in accordance with the [Mayor's revised COVID-19 order authorizing certain construction activity](#).

For Emergency Water Service, Sewer Lateral Repair, New Connection, and Discontinuance permits:

We will process plumbing permits for new connections if the site construction has an approved building or site construction permit issued by Licenses and Inspection (L&I) on or before 3/20/20.

All work must comply with Sections 1 – 5 of [the Mayor's Order](#). During the city's response to COVID-19, we will continue to issue permits to replace existing defective water services and sewer laterals on an emergency basis.

Please carefully review instructions for obtaining these permits as detailed in the [Plumbing Permit Process](#).

May 11

Infrastructure Construction Resumes

The Philadelphia Water Department resumed construction at approved project worksites following Governor Tom Wolf's announcement that construction activities across the state could resume on May 1, 2020.

Our priority at all worksites is the health and safety of our communities. Our teams are utilizing protective equipment, sanitizing procedures, and social distancing. We are committed to ensuring a safe workplace for all employees and protecting their health.

Please see our [Construction Notifications page](#) for information about ongoing work.

To report construction-related incidents or issues requiring immediate attention, please call 215-685-6300.

April 27

Shutoff Freeze for Nonpayment Extended to

June 1

In line with other regional utilities, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) and the Water Revenue Bureau (WRB) have agreed to postpone all water shutoffs for residential and commercial customers who are unable to pay their bills **through June 1, 2020.**

This is a 16-day extension of the original postponement period, which prevented delinquent accounts from being shut off through May 15.

“As our community follows stay-at-home orders, we understand there are broad consequences for many customers. To ensure that those struggling financially will not lose water needed for drinking, washing hands, bathing and cooking, we are putting a temporary freeze on water shutoffs, effective through June 1, 2020,” says *Commissioner Randy Hayman.*

“It is still important to pay your bill if you can, as all of our operations are funded by revenue from water bills. While we are not shutting people off,

customers will still receive a bill and that balance will continue to accumulate as water services are used.”

Customers who cannot pay their bill should apply for help using the application at phila.gov/waterbillhelp

See the [full announcement](#) →

Plumbing Permits

During Philadelphia’s ongoing response to COVID-19, only permits to replace **existing** defective water services and sewer laterals can be issued, on an emergency basis. This includes water service

Discontinuances and Seal Lateral permits. To acquire these permits, please refer to the process outlined [in this fact sheet](#).

Project Permits

The Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) will

grant a time extension to expiration dates for project permits and approvals impacted by the **Pennsylvania Stay at Home** order. Time extensions only apply to PWD-issued permits and approvals. Please contact the listed units for specific assistance and information.

Permit/Approval	Contact Information
SW Plan Review	pwd.planreview@phila.gov
Utility Plans	pwdur@phila.gov
Pre-permits	wtr@phila.gov
Water connections	wtr@phila.gov
Sewer connections	wtr@phila.gov
Flow test data	wtr@phila.gov

Private Development Services

In response to COVID19, Private Development Services switched to limited operations. To review changes to the program, visit the [PWD Plan Review website](#).

Stormwater Grants and Incentives Updates

The **Stormwater Grant application deadline was moved to July 1st [on March 16th, 2020](#)**. The pre-application meeting deadline has been **extended**. If you have a meeting scheduled and would like to reschedule, please email PWDS StormwaterCredits@phila.gov

Delayed Assistance Applications and Call Wait Times

Customers should be aware of longer processing times for customer assistance applications due to limited resources for Water Revenue Bureau staff working remotely.

“These steps are necessary to provide a safe workplace for employees, and we ask for patience from our customers during this health crisis,” *says Deputy Revenue Commissioner Michelle L. Bethel-Miller.*

To ensure a safe workplace for call center staff, in-office employees are staggered. PWD and

Revenue staff ask for patience when calling **(215) 685-6300**, which is currently open for emergencies.

If you are a customer and can't get through, contact the **@PhillyH2O** or **@PhilaRevenue** social media accounts, or email waterinfo@phila.gov.

Web and social media staff will respond as soon as possible but are not a substitute for emergency calls.

For billing issues, customers can use WRBHelpdesk@phila.gov.

MARCH 25

Philadelphia Water Department crews are working to restore water to all accounts where possible and may need to make emergency repairs during the COVID-19 response.

It may be necessary for workers to speak with a customer or building occupant to investigate taste and odor concerns, provide instructions for turning water on or off, confirm the status of water pressure in the building, or provide plumbing-

flushing instructions after repairs are made.

In order to maintain safety protocol during the COVID-19 response, PWD workers who are required to contact customers for emergency repair work will follow social distancing practices and may use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, eye protection and a protective suit or mask.

We understand the concerns of our customers.

Protecting their health and ensuring a safe workplace for all PWD employees is our highest priority.

Notice of Defect and Emergency Loans

Plumbers and other private contractors making emergency repairs are exempt from the City's restrictions on business activity. That means if you have a plumbing issue and need to hire a contractor there are no restrictions.

Applications for interest-free emergency HELP loans are still being processed. Call the hotline or follow directions on the Notice of Defect delivered

to your home so you can get your issue addressed as quickly as possible and keep your water flowing. More info and [HELP applications are available online](#). You can also address the HELP office at PWDHelpLoan@phila.gov or (215) 685-4901 to leave a message.

Restoring Water

Crews began turning water back on for customers, beginning with residential accounts, who lost water for nonpayment March 13. There is no fee. **If you still do not have water please call us right away.** In some cases an inspector may have visited your property and discovered unsafe plumbing conditions, such as flowing water that would flood homes.

MARCH 20

Fees Waived

As a temporary measure, all penalties and late fees for water bills are suspended until further

notice for Philadelphia’s residential and commercial water customers. The City of Philadelphia will continue to review this decision with guidance from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health.

Loss of Water

We are not shutting off water for nonpayment but may have to stop flow to water mains to make emergency repairs. In the event of a water main break, customers may lose water without warning. When possible, we will give residents as much time to prepare as we can. See reported breaks here: [Construction Map](#)

Construction Freeze

All non-emergency work is suspended. We have instructed crews to make work sites safe until construction can resume. If you think an inactive construction site is hazardous, please call (215) 685-6300 and we will investigate.

March 18

[See this blog post from the City of Philadelphia](#) to track impacts to City services.

During a joint address with City of Philadelphia departments and agencies, Commissioner Hayman again stressed today that water is safe and not impacted by this virus and that no one will be shut off unless necessary for repairs.

Watch the address here or see his full statement below:

<https://www.facebook.com/phillyhealth/videos/837327356781680/>

March 18, 2020 PWD Statement for COVID-19 Health Emergency

“The safety of our customers and our employees is, as always, our highest priority.

All necessary Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) operations will continue uninterrupted to ensure delivery of safe, clean drinking water and treatment of wastewater.

Philadelphia's drinking water is safe to drink, and customers do not need to purchase bottled water.

PWD and our Bureau of Laboratory Services want to assure customers that the virus will not impact the safety of the city's water supply. Conventional water treatment methods, including filtration and disinfection used at all of Philadelphia's drinking water plants, removes or inactivates the virus that causes COVID-19.

We continue to test and monitor our drinking water 24/7 to ensure the highest quality water for the residents of Philadelphia.

As we face this challenge as a city, the Water Department and the Water Revenue Bureau wants Philadelphians to know that losing access to water because they're falling behind on their bill is one thing they won't have to worry about.

We will not shut off customers who fall behind on payments through May 15. In addition, this week we began restoring water service to customers previously shut off due to delinquent water accounts.

However, in some cases, such as water main breaks and essential infrastructure repairs, we may have to shut off flow to water mains to make repairs. When possible, we will give residents as much time to prepare as possible.

Our emergency crews and the contractors we work with will make repairs as quickly as possible to minimize the time customers are without water. If you have a plumbing emergency or receive a Notice of Defect from PWD, prepare not to have water for at least several hours and make repairs as soon as possible.

Plumbers and other private contractors are exempt from the City's restrictions on business activity. That means if you have a plumbing issue and need to hire a contractor there are no restrictions.

Our staff is still processing applications for our interest-free emergency HELP loans, so call us if you need that or follow directions on the Notice of Defect so you can get your issue addressed as quickly as possible and keep your water flowing.

The PWD customer contact center (215) 685-6300

will be open for emergencies 24/7 or you can email us at waterinfo@phila.gov. Because we are using essential staff only, we ask that you only call our hotline if absolutely needed.

We won't shut you off so most billing issues can wait, or many billing issues and questions can be handled through MyPhillyWaterBill at phila.gov/waterbill

For Water Department-only updates, see our website at phila.gov/water or check our Twitter and Facebook feeds. You'll find us (at) @PhillyH2O

Thank you to all the PWD employees who are helping the city to address this unprecedented emergency. Those who are staying home are doing their part to ensure we do everything we can to not overwhelm our health system.

March 16

As City officials respond to the COVID-19 emergency, the Philadelphia Water Department is taking **all necessary measures** to ensure delivery

of safe, clean drinking water and treatment of your wastewater.

Commissioner Hayman and PWD's Bureau of Laboratory Services also want to assure customers that the virus **will not impact the safety of the city's water supply**. Philadelphia's drinking water is high-quality and **safe to drink** and customers do not need to purchase bottled water. International experts inform health officials that the virus has not been detected in drinking water.

Conventional water treatment methods, including filtration and disinfection used at all of Philadelphia's drinking water plants, removes or inactivates the virus that causes COVID-19.

We continue to test and monitor our drinking water supplies 24/7 to ensure the highest quality water for the citizens of Philadelphia.

See the Environmental Protection Agency information [on COVID-19 and drinking water and wastewater](#).

Water Department leadership is coordinating

closely with City, state and federal authorities as needed.

Continued Service Under Essential Personnel Policy

[Statement from the Mayor's Office:](#)

“Non-essential City of Philadelphia government operations are halted, and all City government buildings will be closed to the public, effective tomorrow, **Tuesday, March 17, 2020**. (Staff members are still expected to report to work on Tuesday, March 17, unless otherwise instructed by their supervisor.)

Beginning Wednesday, March 18, all non-essential City workers will not need to report to work. Individual department heads are currently determining what operations are essential. Employees will be receiving additional information on their status in the next 24 hours. Essential operations will include public safety, health and human services, utilities, sanitation, and payroll.”

While the Water Department and all City agencies are required to be staffed by essential personnel only, all necessary operations **will continue uninterrupted.**

With the **essential personnel policy enacted**, we are working to minimize potential impacts, including longer call wait times and delayed response to water emergencies such as water main breaks.

March 13

Water Shutoffs Postponed

Beginning Monday, March 16, PWD and the Water Revenue Bureau (WRB) will work together to **restore water service** to all delinquent residential and commercial customers **through Friday, May 15** and the restoration fee will be waived.

In addition, we will ***not shut off water service*** for delinquent residential and commercial accounts

through May 15.

Residential customers who have been shut off for meter non-compliance will also have their water service restored until May 15.

Customers that have been shut off for not repairing defects in their private plumbing will still need to make the necessary repairs to have their water restored.

We will provide updates as necessary [on our website](#).

Events Canceled or Postponed

Out of an abundance of caution, [Rain Check workshops](#) **scheduled to take place on March 18, 19, 21, 23 and 24 are canceled**. We apologize for any inconvenience. Register for future workshops on the [Rain Check website](#).

Community meetings to provide updates about *Green City, Clean Waters* construction projects for stormwater management **are also being postponed** for the time being.

Watershed cleanups planned with partners for later this spring are also likely to be impacted. Please sign up for [PWD email or SMS updates](#) for the latest information about these events.

Stormwater Grants Impacts: Deadline Moved

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PWD Stormwater Incentives team has the following updates:

- **The Stormwater Grants deadline has been moved back to July 1st.**
- **In-person pre-application meetings are canceled.** If you have a pre-application meeting scheduled, please contact the Incentives Team at PWDStormwaterCredits@phila.gov to discuss a teleconference update, cancelation or modification to your scheduled meeting.
- As the situation changes each day, the Stormwater Incentives Team will send email updates regarding team availability for project reviews. **For email bulletin updates, [please subscribe here.](#)**

- Due to the fast-changing updates we have, the deadlines posted [on our website](#) may be outdated. Other than deadlines, all other requirements in our Stormwater Grant Application Guide still hold for the next application deadline.