



PSC Water Currents

**The water conservation and efficiency newsletter of the
Public Service Commission of Wisconsin**

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New Information Available on PSC Website

Released in March, the PSC's annual [Bulletin 25 Report](#) provides net bills for standard quantities of water sold to residential, commercial, and industrial water utility customers. To facilitate comparisons, the report groups water bills by utility class and computes an average quarterly bill for each class as well as a bill for all classes combined. Class AB utilities are the largest utilities with 4,000 customers or more, Class C utilities serve between 1,000 and 3,999 customers, and Class D utilities serve fewer than 1,000 customers. These bills are calculated based on the general service rates the utilities have on file with the Commission. As of March 2014, the average water bill for a residential customer using 18,750 gallons in a quarter was \$91.18. This amount represents a 5% increase over a comparable average bill included in last year's report. In addition to this report, you can find maps of the water bill comparisons by meter size, class, and county at: <http://psc.wi.gov/utilityInfo/maps/water/index-water.htm>.

In accordance with Wisconsin Act 134, The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin has created a standard form for a municipal utility to obtain a customer's consent to the release of customer information. The following link will take you directly to the standard release form to be used by all municipal utilities in Wisconsin. You can find the standard release form [here](#).

Conservation Helps Limit Rate Increases for Colorado Utility

Many utilities cite the "conservation conundrum" - declining per capita water use attributable to water conservation - as creating a need to increase rates. However, in areas experiencing growth, how much more would ratepayers pay **without** conservation measures in place? The Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) recently published a case study that shows how customers in one Colorado city avoided increasing their water rates by 99% and their wastewater rates by 18% by conserving water over the past 30 years. AWE's article documents the experience of utility customers in Westminster, Colorado, a suburb of Denver. Like many areas of the country, Westminster has seen a 21 percent reduction in average per capita water demand since 1980. While rates have indeed risen over this same time period, by avoiding some of the high costs associated with new water supply and infrastructure, these rates have increased significantly less than they would have had per capita demand remained at 1980 levels. A free download of this article is available [here](#).

Tackling a Tough Issue: the Need to Increase Water Rates

Most water industry professionals are very familiar with the trends: nationwide, water rates are rising faster than the rate of inflation, and at the local level, it can be very difficult to obtain the water rates necessary to sustain a utility that is financially and operationally viable. Several recently released articles examine the factors contributing to the rapid rise in rates and recommend strategies for helping utilities gain approval for the rates they need. Columbia University's Columbia Water Center examined the 2010 AWWA water rate survey results, U.S. Census demographic data, and NOAA climate data in compiling "[America's Water: An Exploratory Analysis of Municipal Water Survey Data](#)." The Columbia researchers developed findings regarding the roles operating expenses, debt, water source, utility size, population, and climate play in affecting rates and concluded that "...participating in raising awareness among their ratepayers and stakeholders, plus exploring ways of collaborating with such partners, will increase (utilities') opportunities to influence what occurs elsewhere within their jurisdictions."

The Environmental Finance Center at the University of North Carolina looked at "[Water Rate Increases Among 1,961 Utilities in Six States in the Last Decade](#)" (which included Wisconsin utilities) and concluded that utilities that raised rates more frequently experienced lower average annual rate increases, thereby reducing the rate shock their customers experienced. In addition, utilities with more frequent rate increases accumulated, on average, larger total increases in the long run. The importance of effective communication is emphasized in both a collaborative effort between the Pacific Institute and the Alliance for Water Efficiency entitled "[Water Rates: Communication and Education](#)," and the results of an AWWA/WEF Utility Management Conference workshop: "[Eight Communication Strategies to Help Water Utilities Get the Rates They Need](#)." These reports outline more general communication strategies that enhance public understanding of general water service, availability, quality, regulatory and cost issues, as well as more targeted strategies to support rate making decisions.

Spring Workshops and Webinars

Over the next several months, a number of in-person and online learning opportunities will be available to water utility operators, managers, financial staff, and decision makers. On April 16, the Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) launches its Exemplary Programs webinar series with "Innovative Outdoor Conservation Programs," featuring Karen Guz, Director of Conservation for the San Antonio Water System and 2012 AWE Water Star award winner. This 45 minute webinar will focus on San Antonio's innovative outdoor efficiency programs, and Ms. Guz will share lessons learned in Texas that can be applied to other water utilities facing water supply challenges. AWE's May 6 webinar entitled "Innovative CII Water Efficiency Programs" will feature representatives of City West Water in Melbourne, Australia which implemented a successful utility program that helped its commercial, institutional, and industrial customers improve efficiencies and save water. [Registration](#) for these webinars is free to AWE members and \$45 for non-members. Visit the [AWE website](#) to learn about the benefits of becoming an AWE annual member.

Registration is open now for several Wisconsin Water Association (WWA) seminars. The April 17 [Treatment Operations Seminar](#) will include sessions on cost and performance of various treatment technologies, cold weather operations, changes in Lake Michigan water chemistry, and other topics related to system efficiency and efficacy. On May 7, WWA will present its annual [Water Supply Regulatory Affairs Seminar](#), and on May 20, WWA's Research Committee is hosting national and state experts who will provide insights into the revised Total Coliform Rule (TCR). The workshop, entitled [Are You Ready for the Revised Total Coliform Rule?](#), will describe the TCR revision process, outline the basic elements required in a Level 1 Assessment, and provide examples of how to collect and manage data to support Level 1 Assessments. This workshop will be available both onsite at the University of Wisconsin's Pyle Center and via webcast.

Water Star Wisconsin, in conjunction with the Town and Country RC&D and Legacy Community programs, recently announced the 2014 spring [Sustainable Strategies](#) municipal webinar series. This series, which features case studies from Wisconsin municipalities, will include sessions on permeable pavement design for stormwater management, automated metering to control water loss and improve efficiency, and green and sustainable remediation. Finally, in advance of many utilities' peak demand summer season, Forester University will present [Enforcing Irrigation Restrictions: Evaluating the Big Hammer in the Conservation Toolbox](#) on April 24.

About this newsletter

Water Currents is published by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin to provide information about water conservation-related news and events in Wisconsin. The newsletter is compiled and edited by Denise Schmidt, PSC Water Conservation Coordinator, (608) 266-1282. To submit information for consideration in future newsletters, send an email to [Denise Schmidt](#). Include your name, organization, and contact information in the body of the message. Subscribe to this newsletter by [clicking here](#)

