

Commissioner's Corner

Why PUD Policies Promote Water Conservation

By Chris Stearns, PUD Commissioner

In the Pacific Northwest, especially west of the Cascades, the excessive rainfall can perpetuate the myth that our water supply is plentiful and widely available. Because of the incessant rain and the snow-packed mountains, we may fail to grasp that our increasingly hot summers and population growth are just a couple important factors that impact our water supply.

In a recent article from The Olympian, the Olympia-Lacey-Tumwater region is considered one of the nation's top 25 fastest-growing metropolitan areas, according to a U.S. Census report. Correspondingly, the community's expansion and growing water demands has resulted in Thurston County securing a title as the county with the second largest number of exempt wells in the state.

Changing precipitation totals merged with increasing water demands for growing populations, agricultural, industrial, and recreational uses can consequentially result in ineffective groundwater recharging. The number of built surfaces and roads also contribute to groundwater charging concerns because rainfall over greater impermeable surfaces become routed to streams rather than going into the groundwater causing erosion. It's important to note that *all* Thurston PUD water systems pull water from groundwater sources.

Recognizing the depleting water supply trends over the last few decades, the Department of Health has created water use efficiency (WUE) measures that are designed to ensure that current and future water supply needs are met, and to prevent potential health and sanitation risks to customers.

As part of complying with DOH water use efficiency laws and standards, the PUD launches conservation goals each year for its water systems. Our WUE goal through 2021 is that all Group A systems (15 connections or more) will use less than 250 gallons per day. And we offer incentives to our customers to promote conservation and efficiency. One year we offered free irrigation timers, and another year we offered free irrigation system assessments.



Chris Stearns
Commissioner, District 3

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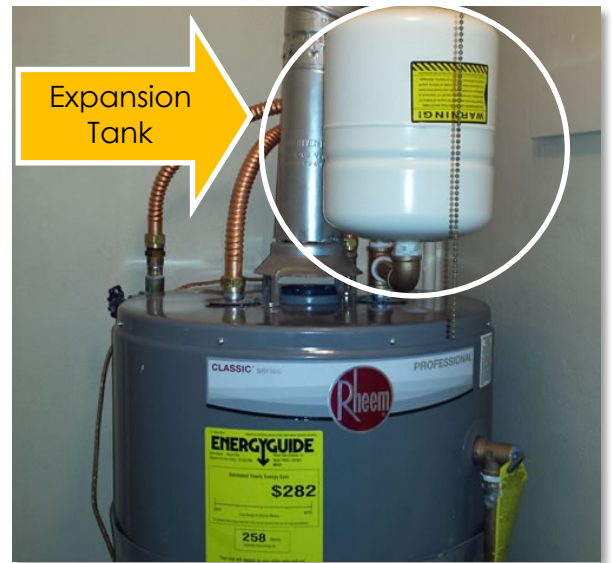
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Do I Need an Expansion Tank on My Water Heater?

When you heat up a kettle of water on the stove, eventually the water will boil and develop pressure inside. This pressure will cause steam to blow out which results in a whistle that indicates, the water is ready for use.

Although the water in your water heater doesn't reach the boiling point and turn into steam, it does expand when heated up. This is called **thermal expansion**.

If you're on a closed plumbing system, the water has nowhere to go. A closed plumbing system lets water in through the supply line and doesn't let it back out except through drains and sewer lines. As the water heater heats the water, it expands, which builds up pressure. When the pressure builds up enough, the temperature and pressure relief valve on the water heater simply does its job. It relieves the excess pressure by leaking a little bit of water onto the floor. This doesn't happen every time that a pressure reducing valve or check valve is installed, but there may be other problems that show up in the house, such as the toilet fill valves randomly re-filling toilets, or faucets chronically dripping. This extra pressure stresses your supply lines, fixtures and appliances.



A common analogy compares having high water pressure in your home to having high blood pressure. It usually doesn't have immediate negative consequences. However, the long-term wear and tear of this excess pressure can reduce the life expectancy of everything on your plumbing system.

How Expansion Tanks Help

When a closed system exists on the water distribution piping in a home, an expansion tank needs to be installed somewhere on the plumbing system. This is a fairly simple and straightforward fix; an expansion tank will give the water somewhere to go when it expands, and the temperature and pressure relief valve on the water heater will stop causing problems.

Expansion tanks work by equalizing pressure throughout the system. An expansion tank is a small tank divided in two sections by a rubber diaphragm. One side is connected to the pipes of the heating system and contains water. The other side is dry and contains pressurized air. As hot water enters the heating system, the pressure in the system increases. As pressure increases, the diaphragm in the expansion tank is pushed down. This compresses the air in the tank, creating more space for excess water to enter. This relieves excess pressure in the system and prevents pipes in the system from being damaged.



If you've noticed that washers in plumbing fixtures seem to wear out rapidly, or if water drips intermittently from the relief valve on the water heater, consult a plumber about the advisability of adding an expansion tank. The cost is relatively modest.

Enroll in the Equal Payment Plan Today!

The Equal Payment Plan (EPP) is a free, stable payment plan. You can find comfort in knowing what to expect each month because you'll pay roughly the same amount year-round. EPP is not a discount program, but it allows you to better manage your monthly budget by keeping water costs predictable and manageable. That way, you can avoid spikes in your bills caused by seasonal changes in how much water you use.

Remember, there's no fee to enroll, and it's easy to manage. It's just another way we can help you better manage your monthly water costs.

How it works

Your monthly bill will be based on your average usage from the past 12 months. On your EPP anniversary date, we will recalculate your next year's payment. Your bill will only change if your usage amount changes. This may result in the PUD crediting your account or you may owe money to the PUD. ***Paying attention to your water consumption throughout the year is critical with this payment option.*** When you sign up for EPP, we first determine your average monthly bill.

What if I use more or less water than I paid for?

If your water use differs greatly from your budgeted amount, we will adjust your future bills accordingly on your EPP anniversary.

Who is eligible?

The Equal Payment Plan program is open to Thurston PUD who have 12 or more months of historic consumption data. If you rent your home, the program enrollment application includes a section for landlord authorization. Please visit www.ThurstonPUD.org for more eligibility requirements.

When can I sign up?

Enrollment is open now!

When is the last day to sign up? When will it begin?

Open enrollment closes March 31, 2020. You will see your first EPP payment on your May bill.

How to sign up

Go online to www.ThurstonPUD.org and fill out an application to enroll.

- You can email your completed application to PUDCustomerService@thurstonpud.org.
- You can print and fax your application to (360) 357-1172.
- You can print and mail your application to us at 1230 Ruddell Road SE, Lacey, WA 98503.
- You can also request an application, and we will print and mail one to you.

For more rules and details, visit www.ThurstonPUD.org or call us at (866) 357-8783.

Coming in April: Take the Survey, Get a \$5 Credit

In April, we invite all PUD customers to take part in a short survey that will help us improve the service we provide you. It's just another way we offer you the opportunity to take part in the way we shape our work.

As our way of saying thanks for completing the survey, we will offer a \$5 credit toward your bill. The survey will launch on April 1 and closes April 30. Accounts will be credited with May bills.

The survey should take about 5-7 minutes to take and can be completed from your mobile device! On April 1, visit www.ThurstonPUD.org and click on the link on the front page.

For more details visit the website or for questions about the survey, call Ruth Clemens at (360) 357-8783 x106.



Employee Spotlight: Teal Reopelle



Teal Reopelle,
Administrative Assistant

Teal Reopelle was hired at the end of 2019 as an Administrative Assistant for the Planning and Compliance Department. Teal, a Wisconsinite, moved to Olympia three years ago where she now resides with three cats and what she believes to be the world's cutest golden retriever. Teal exclaims, "I love being with the PUD. All the employees here are awesome! And so are our customers!"

With a background in environmental ethics, Teal is familiar with conservation and the water industry. She advocates for conservation at all levels, PUD-wide down to customer-focused. Did you know that the average U.S. household uses 300 gallons of water per day? Teal says, "Strive to conserve water and use less than the average! Monthly billing statements now show your usage in both gallons and cubic feet, so be sure to set goals for your household and try hard to reach them."

Important Reminders

Our Customer Service Team would like to kindly remind our customers:

- **Please ensure we have your current contact information.** We may need to contact you regarding water service emergencies, outages, account status, etc. We need your email and phone numbers.
- With the spring season fast approaching, keep an eye on your usage while starting gardens or property maintenance as we transition to usage for the summer season.

Special Note on Cellular Water Meters

In 2019, we offered cellular water meters to customers who wanted to keep a closer eye on their water use. EyeOnWater has created a website and smartphone app that allows customers to access usage information. Once enrolled, the smartphone app will be made available for customers to review usage on the go. Customers pay \$50.00 (\$250 cost) for the meter and agree to a monthly access fee of \$3.00 for the EyeOnWater site and app.

Cellular meters require a reliable connection to the AT&T cellular network. Customers who live in regions that may not have reliable service, will require a site inspection prior to enrollment.

If you would like to participate in the cellular meter program or have any questions, please call Erica Cecil at (360) 357-8783 x122.



Why PUD Policies Promote Water Conservation (continued)

The PUD not only assists customers with conservation; we focus on it too. Each year our team compares the data of water sold to customers and water used by the system. The difference in the numbers act as clues to determine where the greatest loss is occurring. Where the data ends, our field technicians pick up and use field technology to locate and repair leaks. The whole process is painstaking and requires a great orchestrated effort.

Although these audits and repairs can improve our overall water use efficiency, customers can help by recognizing the changes happening in the water industry landscape and reducing their water demands in ways that best suits their lifestyles. Every little bit helps!