



Thurston PUD Newsletter

We are committed to providing safe, reliable, affordable, and sustainable water services to the customers we serve.

April 2019

Commissioner's Corner

Thurston County Prepares for "The Big One"

By Commissioner Linda Oosterman, District 1



In late February I had the privilege of representing Thurston PUD at the Thurston Region's Integrated Emergency Management Course (IEMC), a training course held and paid for by FEMA. One of the first of its kind for Thurston County, the event drew over 100 elected officials, policy makers, and leaders from across the County to identify recovery needs and priorities after a major natural disaster.

The group of leaders were tasked with examining the short-term and long-term impacts of a 9.0 Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake. Given a number of important geographic factors and considerations, FEMA determined that of all major natural disasters, a

catastrophic earthquake was the most likely to impact Thurston County. Local leaders were challenged to create and develop a recovery structure that focused on housing, schools, jobs/economy, and health, and how the county would rebuild from 30 days to nine-months after a major event.

It was very reassuring to see all of the major cities of Thurston County represented and to be a part of the collaborative process. Although there is much work yet to be completed around this planning and coordination, the leaders from each community have made a commitment to creating and implementing a plan.

February's IEMC training was the first of a series of county-wide exercises that will be held, and I am especially pleased to have the opportunity to represent you within the group of city and county leaders on the critical disaster issue of clean water availability.

About Commissioner Linda Oosterman

Linda Oosterman has served as PUD Commissioner since 2012. She received her undergraduate degree in Organization Management and earned her Master's in Systems Theory and Family Therapy from the University of Wisconsin. She has received certifications from the American Water Works Association for successfully completing the Public Officials Program. She has served as a manager of the county-wide Crisis Response Programs in eastern and western Washington. She was also the Director and an instructor in the Human Services Program at Grays Harbor College. As a PUD Commissioner, Linda focuses on Emergency Management Planning, Prevention and Intervention. She supports science and engineering that advances water conservation, drinking water management, and sustainable practices.

Thurston PUD Commissioners

District 1

Linda Oosterman

District 2

Russell E. Olsen

District 3

Chris Stearns

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The Value of Water: Water Rights 101

Washington is considered a water-rich state, particularly west of the Cascades, but water for new uses is becoming more difficult to come by due to growing populations and court decisions.

In Washington State, water belongs to the public and can't be owned by one person or group. However, a person or group can be granted a legal right to use a certain amount of public water, for a defined purpose, in a specific location for a beneficial purpose. The Department of Ecology is responsible for managing the water resources of the state, including issuing **water rights**. They manage over 230,000 active water right certificates, permits, applications and claims, with some rights that were established in the late 1800s.

According to the Department of Ecology, before a water right is issued, the proposed use must meet a four-part test:

- Water must be available (both physically and legally)
- Water must be used beneficially (not wasted)
- Water use must be in the public's interest
- Water use must not impair another existing use

Washington State follows the doctrine of prior appropriation, which means that the first users have rights senior to those issued later. We call this “first in time, first in right.”

There are two types of water rights, surface water and ground water rights. A surface water right is the right to draw water that comes from rivers, streams, springs or lakes. A groundwater right is a right to pull water from an aquifer. All Thurston PUD water systems use ground water sources.

Our state has some of the most complex water laws in the nation, and it has become increasingly difficult to be granted new water rights. As the population of our state grows, more and more people and organizations are vying for water resources. The Department of Ecology has tightened up loose practices from the early settlement days in order to ensure water use for generations to come.

All Thurston PUD Group A water systems have a water right. **Group A** water systems are defined as having 15 or more active connections. Each water right is unique as to where it can be used and how much water can be used. Each Thurston PUD water right is approved for a specific water system, meaning water pulled from the aquifer is used at the corresponding water system. Each water right has a set number of acre feet of water allotted to it. An **acre foot** of water is 325,851 gallons of water. Not only can underuse of a water right affect the water right holder, but so can overuse. Exceeding a water right can impact the owners of the water system and may result in litigation.

Most of our **Group B** water system, those systems with less than 15 connections, use permit-exempt wells, or wells that are located in rural areas where community supply is unavailable. Typically, these wells serve single homes, small housing developments, small irrigation needs, and stock watering. Thurston PUD permit-exempt wells are approved to use up to 5,000 gallons per day.

To learn more about water rights you can go to the Department of Ecology's website at ecology.wa.gov.



Water rights were staked just like this land rights claim.

Ask a PUD Employee

If there was a water outage at my water system, and the problem is fixed, why do I have to wait to use my water?

This month's question is answered by Kim Gubbe, Director of Planning and Compliance. Kim has worked for Thurston PUD for 14 years and holds an Environmental Technical degree from Clover Park. She was named Water Operator of the Year by the Washington State Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water in 2011. She also coaches three sports for Special Olympics of Thurston County.

Water outages are caused by many different events like a mainline break or leak, equipment failure, overuse or peak-day demands. These outages can cause the reservoir to drain or the pumping system to fail, and it's important that we allow the water system to recover.

We ask customers to wait 20 minutes before attempting to use water to allow the water system to recover.

When water is restored, the sudden flow scours the mineral buildup through the pipes. We highly recommend flushing from an outdoor hose bib or bathroom tub faucet for up to ten minutes or until the water is clear. If the water does not clear up after 10 minutes, please give us a call at (360) 357-8783.

Meet the PUD: Jason Choate, Field Technician

Field Technician Jason Choate enjoys so many different aspects of water utility work, but especially the vast array of work each day can bring. Maybe that's why he's been in the water industry for over 13 years. As the District's Cross Connection Control Specialist, Jason prepares pumphouses and water systems for the Department of Health's sanitary survey inspections and conducts cross connection inspections as part of hazard prevention. He's also skilled at conducting backflow testing. "One of my favorite aspects of the job (besides the job diversity) is being a part of providing safe drinking water and quality service to customers," he said.

Jason has been a great addition to the PUD family, and he mentors the new members of the Field Operations Team. His experience includes residential and commercial plumbing. He is certified as a plumber/electrician that specializes in pumping systems.

When he's not at work, Jason likes to spend time with his family and focus on his physical fitness.



Jason Choate
Field Technician

Do We Have Your Updated Information?

We understand your privacy is important to you. Ensuring that you are aware of your water service status is important. If your water system experiences an outage, we want to be able to get that information to you as soon as possible. Sharing your most updated contact information ensures that you are always in the know about your water service.

To update your information or for more information please call (360) 357-8783.



“Project Help” Fund Keeps the Water on For Struggling Families

Historically, colder months mean lower water bills for PUD customers, but other bills like power bills go up as families try to keep their homes warm. Financial hardships do not discriminate according to seasons. For years, Thurston PUD has offered an assistance fund that helps low-income families keep the water running in their homes. The “Project Help” program allows Thurston PUD customers to contribute by making donations through their PUD bill. Your help is appreciated and all proceeds go to a family that is experiencing financial hardship. You can make a one-time donation or monthly donations.

Simply fill out the authorization form below and mail it back with your bill. If you have questions, please call us at (360)-357-8783.

I authorize Thurston PUD to bill my account \$ _____

One-time to be donated to the Project Help Fund

Each month

This authorization shall remain in effect until PUD receives written notification from me to terminate this agreement. I understand that if my account becomes past due, this authorization becomes invalid.

Name _____

Service Address _____

Customer Account Number _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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