



Thurston PUD Newsletter

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

May 2019

Leadership Message

Implementing Changes that Matter to You

By Julie Parker, Assistant General Manager



Our relationships with our customers are the most important aspect of all our jobs here at Thurston PUD. As Assistant General Manager, Customer Service is one of the areas that is under the umbrella of my responsibilities. So, it's important to me to hear what you have to say about the service you're receiving. Believe it or not, customers are our greatest and first line of communication when it comes to water outages or other system issues—and I don't think customer service should be any different. So, when you have a suggestion that could help improve your experience, we'd like to hear it. I would love to share a couple important changes

that are happening around the District.

This month we are pleased to announce the launch of a new automated payment system that you can use to pay your bill over the phone without waiting in a holding queue. We used feedback from customers who expressed that they still wanted to call in to pay their bills but didn't want to wait on hold. The launch of this new automated system presents a win-win situation: customers who want to make a payment over the phone can still call in, and the customer service team has fewer customers on hold.

There are changes happening within each department of the PUD including Field Operations. With our larger numbers, we saw an opportunity to reduce the contracted work that we hire out. By completing as much construction as we can "in-house," we are able to potentially save hundreds of thousands of dollars in the coming years. We also recognized that we would need to supply our team with the appropriate equipment and training to accomplish this goal. After taking an assessment of our equipment needs, we determined a vactor truck would provide the District with the greatest benefit to our field operations. Vactor trucks are a valuable industry standard tool enabling us to dig down to our buried infrastructure in a way that reduces the risk of damaging our pipes and other buried utility infrastructure. Purchasing a long-lasting, versatile piece of equipment instead of hiring from for-profit companies means big savings to the District and its customers.

Most of the changes you hear about are infrastructural changes that are made directly to your water system, but I would like you to keep in mind that there are changes we are making to improve the customer service experience as well. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact us at PUDCustomerService@ThurstonPUD.org or at 360-357-8783.

Thurston PUD Commissioners

District 1

Linda Oosterman






District 2

Russell E. Olsen

District 3

Chris Stearns

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The Value of Water: Repairing Underground Leaks Not Just a Pipe Dream

Improving technology allows water utilities to address unaccounted for water loss which can take a costly toll on water systems and their components.

Thurston PUD owns and operates 275 water systems, serves 7,850 families, and utilizes hundreds of miles of water mains. It's no wonder unaccounted for leak loss can cost a water utility thousands of dollars in repairs, premature water system component deterioration and constant chemical replenishment.

Utility teams can spend hours each week trying to locate unaccounted for water loss by reviewing bills, testing meters for accuracy, checking water pressure, reviewing service orders, and countless site visits to visually inspect the area. Leaks can be extremely difficult to find and repair due to the lack of detailed mapping of piping networks.

Leak detection technology has advanced significantly from the days of the ancient Romans who used visual inspection to detect leaks. Since then, devices have been introduced including data loggers, ground penetrating radar, and acoustic leak detectors. The reality is that most of the water pipes in the ground today are the same pipes that were installed up to 50 years ago. There are not many things today that are used daily and frequently that can reliably function 50 years later. Pipes are no exception. With this in mind, Thurston PUD has not only invested in leak detection equipment, but has also collaborated with partnering groups like the Regional Water Cooperative of Pierce County (RWPCPC) to share leak detection equipment—an exchange that has saved the District thousands of dollars.

Data Loggers

Data loggers are the first step in the PUD's leak detection process. These battery-operated data collectors use sound detection to determine when and where water is moving through a specified location. They magnetically attach to valves, hydrants, meter setters or any suspected leaky line. Multiple data loggers can be deployed to survey a large location. For instance, the PUD recently deployed 48 data loggers that were up to a quarter mile apart, many of which are co-owned and loaned by the RWPCPC. Data loggers are typically used during overnight, quiet hours when there is minimum interference of traffic and water usage noise. They can be effective in

detecting the frequency and estimated volume of water that is moving through a pipe and can locate a leak within yards. Once field technicians verify the general area in which a leak may be located, they deploy additional equipment to further narrow the area of the leak.



X marks the spot: Field technicians locate pipes using GPR. The "X" marks the suspected leak location.

Ground Penetrating Radar

Once the location to search is determined, field technicians deploy the Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to locate pipes. For Thurston PUD, using GPR is a critical verifying process before our field technicians put shovels to the ground. Technicians roll the GPR over the location to determine where pipes are located. However, with thousands of miles of various utility pipes underground, GPRs are helpful in locating pipes, but not isolating the leak location.

Acoustic Leak Detection

Underground water leaks make a hissing or whooshing sound that, with enough pressure and on rare occasions, can be heard above ground—but that's a perfect-world scenario.

Many factors affect the intensity of a water leak sound including water pressure, pipe material and diameter, soil type, depth, and what is on the surface over the soil.



Attaching a data logger to a valve.

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Paying Your Water Bill Just Got Easier!

No more waiting on hold over the phone to pay your bill. We've created a simpler, faster way to pay your water bill over the phone by launching an automated payment system. We've even added an option for our Spanish-speaking customers. So, skip the phone queue, and call our Customer Service line at (360) 357-8783 and press 1 to go directly to our automated payment system.

You can still pay your bill online at www.ThurstonPUD.org or by mailing a payment to Thurston PUD
1230 Ruddell Road SE
Lacey, WA 98503



Meet the PUD: Kurin Miller, Accounting Assistant II



Kurin Miller
Accounting
Assistant II

It's never a dull day at Thurston PUD when Kurin Miller clocks in. In the five years that Kurin has been with the District, she has established a reputation as a fun, outgoing, hardworking employee. "Everyday is exciting," she said, which is a testament to her constant positive outlook. "I like working with people from diverse backgrounds," she said.

As a Senior Accounting Assistant, some of her responsibilities include payroll processing, training new employees and auditing customer accounts. She plays an active roll in reviewing and improving processes and policies. As an auditor of customer accounts, she kindly reminds customers, "Please keep your records updated with our office so we can contact you." Updated contact information allows us to contact you if there's an outage or water emergency.

Kurin is newly married and she and her husband are proud parents to five small dogs, a cat and a rabbit.

"I like working for a water utility, as clean water is vital to human life," she said.

May 5-11 is National Water Week

Water utilities, private companies and government agencies will be recognizing National Drinking Water Week May 5 through May 11. The week long celebration gives utilities the opportunity to educate customers on the value of their water supply, recognize the hard work and dedication of employees and the vital role water plays in each of our lives.



This year's theme "Protect the Source" focuses on how water professionals and the communities they serve have a unique opportunity to work together to protect our most vital resource.

Thurston PUD is proactive in making sure we provide customers clean, safe, and reliable drinking water as we aim to stay ahead of challenges. We have an experienced Field Operations Team that construct, inspect, maintain and repair our water systems and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our Administration and Customer Service Team delivers effective and efficient customer service and oversees the financial and accounting functions of our small utility. Our Planning and Compliance Team works diligently to ensure your water is safe and reliable through asset management and managing compliance to state and federal regulations.

If you see potential pollution that could affect your water sources and aquifers, call us at (360) 357-8783, 24 hours, 7 days a week. Take a moment out of your day in May to celebrate Water Week!

Ask a PUD Employee

Help! I'm confused about third party payment services and Bill Pay!

Thurston PUD has made it easy to pay your bill online, in-person, or over the phone.

If you pay your water bill online through a third-party service like DOXO, **they** charge you a payment service fee. Third party payment services do not apply a debit payment to your PUD account. Instead, they mail the PUD a check which can tack on an additional 3-7 business days until the check is received. Thurston PUD is not affiliated with DOXO, and we have no control over when checks will be received. We **strongly recommend** that you pay your bills directly at www.ThurstonPUD.org by clicking the Pay Bill Online link in the top left corner of the webpage.

There also seems to be some confusion about Bill Pay through financial institutions. Bill Pay in most cases acts similar to a third-party payment service in that it is not electronically credited to your account. Instead, the payment is debited from your account, then your bank (or their third-party printing service) mails a physical check to our office to apply to your water account.

Third-party and Bill Pay payments are delayed approximately 3-7 business days from the time you 'pay' your water bill on your end until the time we receive the physical check. We cannot post a payment to your account until payment has been received. This type of delay can result in late payment fees.

Please consider paying your bill online directly at www.ThurstonPUD.org, calling us at (866) 357-8783 or visiting our office at 1230 Ruddell Road SE, Lacey, WA 98503. **No payment surcharges apply to payments made directly to Thurston PUD.**

The Value of Water: Leak Detection (continued)

Once the pipes are located by the GPR, field technicians use an Acoustic Leak Detector (ALD) to pinpoint where the leak is along the pipe. These detectors locate underground leaks by detecting "leak sounds" and amplifying them for operators to hear. Acoustic detectors have filters that block out background noise and can hear over six feet under the ground. Operators wear special headphones that help them track a leak source. An ALD acts as the final and pinpointing task in the leak detection process.

Despite these advancements in leak detection technology, further investment by all levels of the water utility industry needs to be made to reduce unaccounted for water loss. With aging water infrastructure, the lack of funding to assist water utilities, and an overloaded workforce, leaking pipes are added to the long list of obstacles all water utilities will face in the coming years--all while trying to keep rates at a sustainable level to operate. Really small water utilities are not as fortunate as Thurston PUD, in that they may not have the financial means to purchase leak detection equipment, but customer education and investment could help them save their crumbling infrastructure. Lastly, partnerships like the ones we have created with the RWPCPC, allows water utilities to support one another and save customers money.



Acoustic Leak Detector helps pinpoint leaks within inches.

Laughter: The Other Important Element

A teenager texts his dad on a cold winter's morning: "Windows frozen, won't open." His dad texted back, "Gently pour some lukewarm water over it, and gently tap edges with hammer." The teenager sent a text back 5 minutes later, "Computer really messed up now."

Who carries out operations in water? A sturgeon.

I love watching running water on the internet. Was watching a live stream.