



# NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF THE RATEPAYER ADVOCATE

*Utility News for Consumers*

## The Cost of Clean Water Rises

When you open your water bill, are you surprised that the total bill is higher than you expected? You are not alone.

New Jersey residents have traditionally had confidence that their drinking water would be clean, affordable and limitless. But, in recent years, the “cost” of clean water has increased sharply, and water bills reflect that fact.

One major factor driving up water rates has been the cost of implementing federal and state environmental laws to maintain a safe and clean water supply. Another factor is the cost of replacing aging water supply infrastructures, e.g., mains and pipes, and of meeting a growing demand for water because of increased housing development and new industries in the State of New Jersey.

Rate increases throughout the state are being triggered by the costs of complying with the Clean Water Act (CWA) and the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The CWA and SDWA are federal laws designed to improve water quality and improve the safety of drinking water. The SDWA mandated the construction of tremendously expensive new water treatment plants aimed at ensuring clean water for New Jersey. The costs of building these new treatment plants are almost entirely passed on to New Jersey customers.

Larger water utilities in New Jersey have completed their construction projects and the costs for most are already included in customers’ rates. Some of the major water treatment projects to date have been United Water’s Haworth water treatment plant, NJ-American’s Tri-County Water Treatment plant, Middlesex Water’s upgrade and expansion of its CJO Water Treatment Plant, and Elizabethtown Water’s Canal Road Water Treatment facility.

However, smaller water systems are finding it difficult to comply with the federal environmental requirements, because they cannot afford the large capital expenditures required to construct these state-of-the-art water treatment facilities. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of larger New Jersey water utilities acquiring the smaller systems and bringing them into compliance with the federal requirements.

The N.J. Division of the Ratepayer Advocate is pleased to provide you with consumer information about your basic utility services. Here’s what you’ll learn about water in this issue:

- Water quality report cards.....Page 2
- Ways to save money on water rates.....Page 2
- Scambusters!.....Page 4

Indeed, water rates are rising faster than the rate of inflation. It has been estimated that anywhere from one in four to one in six customers are currently paying more than two percent of their household income for water service. The result is that affordability is emerging as an issue for the water ratepayer in much the same way as affordable rates have become a policy issue in the energy sector.

The Ratepayer Advocate has been working closely with water utilities to develop payment assistance programs, including affordable billing arrangements, conservation programs and expanding community outreach programs to enable consumers to effectively manage their water bills through conservation and diligence. The Ratepayer Advocate strongly believes that education is the key factor in reducing one's costs. The more you know, the better, more intelligently you can manage your consumption.

## Water Quality Report Cards Are Coming Your Way!

A new federal rule will require water companies in New Jersey and throughout the nation to provide consumers with annual "report cards" on the quality of their drinking water beginning October 1999.

These Consumer Confidence Reports will include practical information for consumers about drinking water. They may also provide the impetus for consumers to become involved in helping to improve those conditions, if necessary, or to help protect a good quality water source.

Reports will be developed by water utilities and must provide the following fundamental information about drinking water:

- \* what rivers, lakes or underground aquifers are the source(s) of the drinking water;

- \* a brief summary of the susceptibility to contamination of the local drinking water source, based on the source water assessments that states are completing over the next five years;

- \* how to get a copy of the water system's complete source water assessment;

- \* the level/range of levels of any contaminant found in local drinking water;

- \* the likely source of that contaminant in the local drinking water supply;

- \* the potential health effects of any contaminant detected in violation of an EPA health standard, and an accounting of the water system's actions to restore safe drinking water;

- \* the water system's compliance with other drinking water-related rules;

- \* educational information on nitrate, arsenic or lead in areas where these contaminants are detected above 50% of EPA's standards; and

- \* phone numbers of additional sources of information, including the water system and EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791).

These Consumer Confidence Reports are the centerpiece of the right-to-know provisions in the 1996 Amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act.

## You Can Lower Your Water Bill

Conserving water in your home is easy: Check for leaks; install water-saving devices; and develop some good water management habits.

### Checking for leaks ...

A steady drip of a leaking faucet can waste as much as 20 gallons per day. A more serious type of leak can occur in toilet tanks, wasting as much as 200 gallons of water a day. Since

leaking water runs from the tanks into the bowl, you can't see it or hear it.

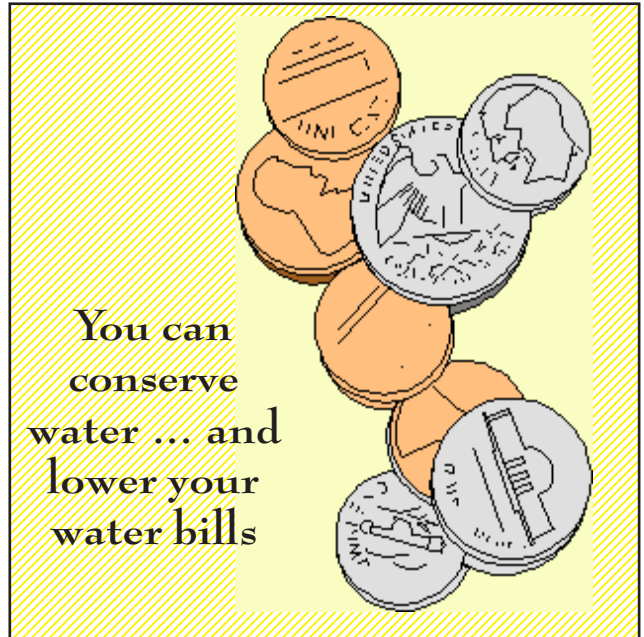
You can check for a toilet leak by obtaining and using a leak detection kit from your local water utility company. You can also remove the tank cover and placing a few drops of food coloring in the tank, preferably when the toilet will be unused for several hours. If the food coloring seeps into the bowl, your toilet has a leak. Correcting these leaks is an easy and inexpensive way to reduce your water consumption.

### Water-saving devices work.

You can also buy water-saving devices, which are generally inexpensive and easy to install. These include:

- \* water pressure reducers, which are installed on water lines;
- \* aerators to reduce the flow of water through your faucet;
- \* high-pressure, low flow showerheads; and,
- \* toilet tank dams, which reduce the amount of water in the tank. Bricks are not recommended because they can break parts of the toilet if you drop them and they can deteriorate in the water.
- \* If you are installing a new toilet, buy one that uses less water than the five to seven gallons a conventional toilet uses. If you are purchasing a new clothes washer, buy one that has variable water level settings.

The steady drip of a leaking faucet can "cost" you 20 gallons per day; a toilet leak can waste as much as 200 gallons of water per day.



### New habits can save you money.

By changing a few habits, you can save even more money. Consider:

- \* taking shorter showers;
- \* running washing machines only with full loads of laundry;
- \* running dishwashers only with full loads of dishes;
- \* watering lawns every other day and water in the evening instead of the heat of the day to reduce evaporation;
- \* selecting native plants for your garden that don't require more water than nature suppliers. Inquire at your local nursery; and,
- \* collecting rain water in garbage cans to water plants, wash cars, windows, driveways or sidewalks.

\* \* \* \*

## Scam-busters!

Consumers have been defrauded by companies that offer to test water quality in homes and then attempt to sell the homeowner unneeded water treatment equipment for as much as \$4,000.00. If you are contacted by any company, other than your water utility, to test your water, decline such testing and immediately contact your water utility.

Beware of people posing as utility meter readers. There has been a rise in burglaries when thieves posed as utility workers

have stolen valuables from unsuspecting residents. By state regulation, utility meter readers are required to wear identification badges on their clothing.

Always confirm the identity of so-called utility employees who make unsolicited house calls by demanding that they present a valid utility I.D. badge. Also, carefully read your utility bill to determine the date of your next meter reading and note it on your calendar.

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