

SCMU Review

(schmoo ri-vyoo) n. items of interest and information from your Santa Cruz Municipal Utilities

No. 69 SUMMER 2020 SANTA CRUZ MUNICIPAL UTILITIES 212 LOCUST STREET, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060 (831)420-5220 scmu@cityofsantacruz.com

Message from the Water Director



AS I WRITE THIS, SANTA CRUZ IS IN its third month of our response to the coronavirus pandemic. And as we are all experiencing in one way or another, it's a game-changer. No matter how

the virus has touched you or your family, we are living through a time that will be talked about for generations.

At the Water Department, our mission is to provide you with clean, safe drinking water 24/7/365 regardless of the circumstances going on around us.

With that in mind, we have ready-to-go back-up operations plans for a variety of emergencies, including drought, flood, earthquakes, and fires.

Did we have a back-up plan for a pandemic at the ready? No, we didn't. But as always, the dedicated team at the Water Department stepped up to keep the most critical staff and resources safe to ensure the reliability of your drinking water. (You can read about a couple of those critical staff members in this issue.)

At the same time the virus closed things down, several projects that have been years in planning were ramping up. Critical projects to secure the reliability of your drinking water can't wait; even for a pandemic. So we continue to move forward, albeit with masks and enhanced sanitary processes.

Coronavirus doesn't affect drinking water. But it has sure affected the ways in which we provide your drinking water.

Wishing you wellness,

— Rosemary Menard, *Water Director*

WATER RELIABILITY CAN'T WAIT — EVEN FOR A PANDEMIC



THE PIPES, PUMPS, AND TANKS THAT PROVIDE SANTA CRUZ with safe drinking water around the clock are old and fragile. They've served the community well, but must be replaced.

Two of the big projects we've been talking about (and talking about...) for the past three years are finally underway — replacement of a pipeline that delivers 30 percent of raw water supply to the treatment plant (cost: \$3.5 million), and replacement of the Newell Creek Dam inlet/outlet pipeline (cost: \$103 million).

Have you been on our website lately? You can find lots of details, photos, and video on both of these projects, plus others at www.cityofsantacruz.com/h2oprojects

Catch up on projects going on in your neighborhood.

ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES

WE'VE ALL HEARD ABOUT "ESSENTIAL" EMPLOYEES DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS.

Some are obvious, like doctors and nurses and first responders. Others are less obvious, but no less essential. Take the people who make sure you have safe, reliable water to drink, for example.



DUSTIN HOLTZCLAW

Dustin Holtzclaw is the Water Department's Chief Plant Operator at the Graham Hill Water Treatment Facility and has been with the Water Department for 20 years. In a nutshell, Dustin is responsible for ensuring that drinking water leaving the treatment facility meets or exceeds all regulatory standards, and that enough water is available to meet the daily needs of the community.

While there are routine aspects to Dustin's job, like reviewing lots of data and writing lots of reports, ordering treatment chemicals, and conducting regular preventative maintenance on various pieces of equipment,

Dustin also plays a key role in responding to emergencies like power outages, equipment or infrastructure failures, floods, fires — you name it — that require plant shutdowns or restarts.

One aspect of Dustin's work is scheduling plant operators to run the treatment plant 24/7. Operators must be state-certified to do their work, so water purveyors around the country saw the potential for COVID-19 to take out entire water production workforces early on — and the dire consequences it could have on community drinking water systems. "In order to protect our staff from potential exposure to the virus we immediately restricted access to the water treatment facilities," Dustin notes.

"We changed schedules to limit staff onsite to the absolute minimum number needed, to do only the most essential duties. We also enabled as many employees as possible to work from home and shelter in place. We have daily health screenings, no in-person group meetings, and an increased cleaning/disinfection schedule." Access, even to Water Department staff, continues to be restricted.

Despite the enormous responsibility Dustin bears during the pandemic, his outlook is remarkably positive and he still finds his work gratifying, "I get to work with an extremely competent group of water industry professionals and learn something new on a regular basis."

TRAM NGUYEN

Tram Nguyen and her coworkers at the City's California Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP) certified water quality lab are the folks you can thank for verifying your water's safety. She, along with the rest of the Water Quality Lab staff, is responsible for sampling and testing both raw and treated water throughout the City's drinking water system.

Tram has been an Environmental Microbiologist II on the Water Quality team for three years. Unlike Dustin's work, Tram's work is primarily routine. In fact, Tram says that doing the job well requires routine, "Doing the same thing consistently every time is a good policy. It's easy to lose track when you have done the same exact test with the same exact samples hundreds of times. Calibrating instruments before each use, sterilizing laboratory supplies then checking sterility, doing dishes and checking pH, and maintaining meticulous records of every single one of these things are examples of day-to-day tasks in the laboratory."

Water quality work is dictated by regulatory agencies like the California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). Most everything the laboratory tests for is a requirement and therefore highly regulated. Tram and her team analyzes source water, treated water, and water throughout the distribution system.



Like treatment plant operators, water quality staff must complete a rigorous training program prior to working without supervision. They're a critical link in the chain of providing safe, reliable drinking water.

During the COVID-19 crisis the Water Quality team was split into two work groups in an effort to protect the health of at least one of these critical groups of workers.

Each group had four members with a Laboratory Technician, Environmental Microbiologist, Water Quality Chemist, and Water Quality Manager. Additionally, emergency sampling kits were assembled for back up samplers in case both groups were unable to work. After over three months apart, the two groups finally reunited, and now takes the same precautions as treatment operators: daily temperature checks, daily health screens, adapted sample receipt procedures, visitor logs, masks, social distancing, and a lot of cleaning.

When it comes to the non-routine aspects of Tram's job, she loves to update and create new logs and datasheets, and build systems to maximize efficiency in the lab. She says, "I could do it for hours. It really brings out the nerd in me."

Santa Cruz Wastewater Treatment Facility Participates in Effort to Manage the COVID-19 Pandemic

OUR WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITY IS PARTICIPATING in a national COVID-19 Sewage Testing Program organized by Biobot, a leader in wastewater epidemiology. The project is using molecular biology to analyze samples from 400 wastewater facilities throughout the U.S. in an effort to understand the dynamics of the virus in wastewater and to use the data to manage the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



Mohammad Karim, Environmental Microbiologist III, is part of the City's environmental laboratory team.

The City's environmental laboratory and other public environmental health collaborators anticipate a second wave of infections in the fall. It is expected that the data developed now will assist in pandemic management efforts then.

make it a LITTER FREE JULY

DISPOSE OF PLASTIC GLOVES AND FACE MASKS IN THE TRASH.

JUST SAY "NO" WHEN ON THE GO TO PLASTIC UTENSILS AND BOTTLED WATER.

BYOB! BRING YOUR OWN WATER BOTTLE AND REUSABLE UTENSILS TOO.

WWW.CITYOFSANTACRUZ.COM

Our wastewater facility was chosen to participate because City environmental compliance staff have the skills, credentials and technical power to perform the moderately sophisticated analyses.

Sampling of the influent not only includes all of the City, but also a large part of North Santa Cruz County as our Santa Cruz Wastewater Treatment Facility is a regional plant.

Since the start date of May 1, samples are being taken weekly and shipped immediately to the coordinating lab in Massachusetts.



HOW "FREE STUFF" CAN HURT US

REMEMBER THAT "FREE STUFF" LEFT CURBSIDE is considered "illegal dumping." Although well-intentioned residents may claim that such items are picked up immediately by those in need, they are often found in parks, on riverbanks, streets and beaches. City code prohibits such illegal dumping — even on the curb in front of your property.

Our website offers solutions for unwanted items like these. Visit cityofsantacruz.com/recyclerright. Thank you!

FOOD SCRAP DROP-OFF



Residential Food Scrap Drop-Off Pilot Program Coming

FOOD WASTE IS A LEADING CONTRIBUTOR TO GREENHOUSE GAS emissions. Unfortunately, a recent Waste Characterization Study confirms that nearly 25 percent of the material buried in our City landfill is just this: food waste and wasted food. While for the last 10 years, many residents have taken advantage of our \$40 rebate and backyard composting help, such composting is not an option for those lacking time or space to manage food scraps at home. A solution is now on the way — but we need you!

In the next two months, our Resource Recovery team will be launching a Food Scrap Drop-Off Program at several locations around town. Sign-up is required to participate. For more information please contact Leslie O'Malley at (831) 420-5377 or lomalley@cityofsantacruz.



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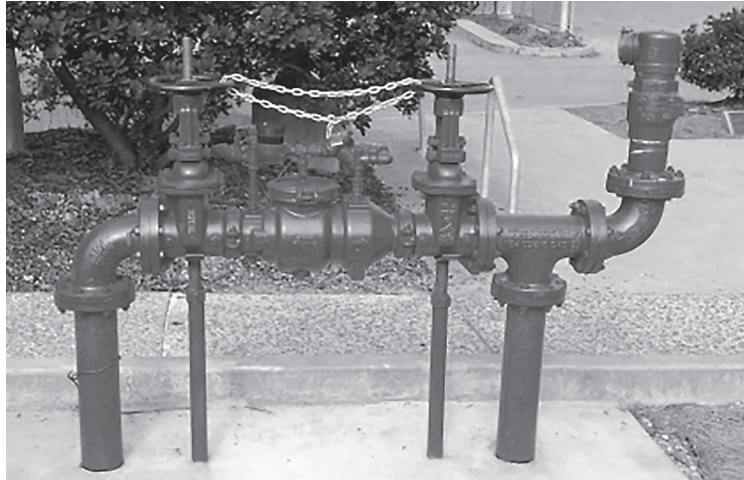
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Backflow. Yuck.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT HOW WATER SYSTEMS ARE SET UP to distribute water to you? What, you haven't? Well, here's the *Reader's Digest* condensed version: Water distribution systems are designed to have water circulate in one direction from treatment to the customer. Sometimes hydraulic conditions (meaning, "operated by pressure transmitted through a pipe by a liquid") within the system change, and cause water to flow in the opposite direction that it was intended.

This is referred to as "backflow." When water circulates back into the system, it has the potential to carry contaminants with it – so we're pretty fussy about making sure that doesn't happen.

To prevent backflow, Santa Cruz Water Department requires a backflow prevention device be installed at the meter for water lines



An example of a commercial fire service backflow device.

serving industrial and some commercial and residential customers. The devices are owned and maintained by the customer; annual testing is managed by SCWD.

We're required by the State Water Resources Control Board's Division of Drinking Water to survey all of our customers who don't currently have backflow devices to determine whether

their uses may actually merit a device. Please be on the lookout for this important survey, and return it to us as quickly as possible. We're including a handy self-addressed envelope to make it easy. Thanks in advance for helping us continue to keep your drinking water as healthy and high-quality as possible!

2019 Water Quality Consumer Confidence Report Available

THE CITY OF SANTA CRUZ WATER DEPARTMENT is pleased to report that your drinking water meets or exceeds all United States Environmental Protection Agency and State Water Resources Control Board – Division of Drinking Water health standards.

The 2019 Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) is now available; this report contains important information about the source and quality of your drinking water.

To view the 2018 Consumer Confidence Report and to learn more about your drinking water, please visit www.cityofsantacruz.com/ccr2019

If you would like a paper copy of the 2019 CCR mailed to your mailing address or would like to speak with someone about the report, please call (831) 420-5220.

Este informe contiene información muy importante sobre su agua potable. Tradúzcalo o hable con alguien que lo entienda bien.

Water Bills and COVID-19

WE KNOW THAT MANY OF OUR CUSTOMERS have taken financial hits during the coronavirus closures. We are offering all the support that we can by not applying late charges to bills, not shutting services off, and not sending bills to collection.

Water utilities in California are governed by Proposition 218. The gist of Prop 218 is that customers may only be charged for the services that they receive, and that all customers are charged equally. In other words, everyone is required to pay the same for the same services regardless of their income status. This prevents us from having "lifeline" rates for one group of customers and not another, and it also prevents us from being able to "forgive" water bills accrued during the pandemic.

So please – pay what you can now so you don't get too far behind. Customer Service: (831) 420-5220 or scmu@cityofsantacruz.com