City of Seattle
Edward B. Murray, Mayor

TACOMA WATER
TACOMA PUBLIC UTILITIES

# NEWS RELEASE

**JOINTLY FROM THE CITIES OF EVERETT, SEATTLE AND TACOMA**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**


**Contacts:**

**City of Everett:** Marla Carter, Public Information and Education Manager, 425.257.8875

**City of Seattle:** Andy Ryan, Seattle Public Utilities, 206.684.7688

**Tacoma Water:** Nora Doyle, Community Relations Specialist, 253.502.8117


## Despite rain, cities ask people to continue reducing water use

*Region reduces water use by 14 percent in four weeks*

**Puget Sound Region** (Sept. 9, 2015) While the rain has been falling off and on recently, Everett, Seattle and Tacoma continue to ask people to reduce water use by 10 percent.

The recent rain helped, but it was not enough to return water supplies to normal levels. More rain and continued water reductions by customers are needed to replenish regional water supplies for people and fish.

Over the last four weeks, the region has collectively cut back water use by 14 percent. The cities are grateful for the actions residents and businesses have taken to reach that point.

Now, as the weather cools, customers should think about what they can do to save water inside.

"We are approaching that time of year when opportunities to save water outdoors decrease, but there are lots of water-saving tips inside our homes that we all can do now and year-round," said Kelly O'Rourke, conservation planner at Seattle Public Utilities. She added that businesses can also examine how they are using water and find ways to reduce water use.

**Indoor water-saving tips for residents:**

- Reduce showering time
- Check for and fix leaks
- Wash only full loads of laundry and dishes
- Turn off the tap while brushing teeth or shaving
- Don't pre-rinse dishes
- If purchasing fixtures/equipment, choose water-efficient models

**Indoor water-saving tips for businesses:**

- Encourage reduced showering times at your facilities
- Serve water only on request

- Check for and fix leaks
- Wash only full loads of laundry and dishes
- Provide new towels only on request
- Check cooling towers for overflow and excessive blowdown
- If purchasing fixtures/equipment, choose water-efficient models

**Outdoor water-saving tips for residents:**

- Let lawns go dormant and limit plant watering to twice a week
- Water plants before 8 a.m. or after 7 p.m.
- Wash your vehicle(s) at locations that recycle the water
- Do only essential pressure washing
- Minimize refilling swimming pools and hot tubs
- Turn off water features

The utilities plan to report how customers are doing every other week; the next round of regional results will be released the week of Sept. 21.

Find a graph illustrating the savings and more water saving tips at www.savingwater.org.

**MORE INFORMATION**

**Map of service areas of Everett, Seattle and Tacoma**

**About Everett:** https://everettwa.gov
Everett operates a regional water supply system that serves 80 percent of the homes and businesses in Snohomish County. This includes Everett and 95 other cities and water districts and serves a population of about 570,000. Get Everett water supply information.

**About Seattle:** www.seattle.gov/util
Seattle operates a regional water supply system serving 1.3 million people, including residents of Seattle as well as 25 other cities and water districts in King County. Get Seattle water supply information.

**About Tacoma:** www.tacomawater.com
Tacoma Water supplies water directly to about 316,000 people in Tacoma, University Place, Ruston and areas of unincorporated Pierce and south King counties. The utility also serves relatively small areas within the cities of Puyallup, Fircrest, Lakewood and Bonney Lake. Through wholesale connections, Tacoma Water serves Auburn, Bonney Lake, Fife, Puyallup and parts of Pierce and King counties. Get Tacoma water supply information.

# "Seattle Public Utilities Water Supply FAQ
# "Voluntary Stage"

Revised September 9, 2015

1. **With the recent rain storm and the forecasted rain in the near future, can Seattleites relax and start taking long showers now? If not, why not?**

   The recent storms have brought significant rain to the region, but this has resulted in only a modest increase in the amount of water stored in our water supply reservoirs. More storms of this type will be needed through the fall in order to return storage levels to normal. We continue to ask our customers to reduce their water use to stretch water supplies, for people and fish, to the rainy season.

2. **How many inches would be needed to bring that water level number back up to normal?**

   It's difficult to provide a specific amount of rain needed to bring the water levels in the reservoirs back to normal for this time of year because there's a host of factors that must be considered, including:

   - The frequency and intensity of the rain
   - Whether the rains are sustained over time
   - The amount of water used by people
   - The amount of water released to rivers for fish
   - The amount and variability of inflows into the reservoirs

   The recent rain storm helped, although most of the rain got absorbed into the ground because it was so dry. If we get a continuous stretch of rain, that will help even more. In the meantime, we continue to watch all of these factors daily, track short-term and extended weather forecasts, adjust river and reservoir system operations as needed, and utilize advanced computer simulation models to determine our water supply outlook.

3. **It hasn't rained much since April – how does this year's rainfall in your reservoirs compare to last year? What is the precipitation deficit for both the Tolt and Cedar reservoirs from April through August?**

   Precipitation deficit from April through August:

   - The Cedar is minus 13 inches.
   - The Tolt is minus 13 inches.

4. **How are you measuring whether the 10 percent voluntary reduction target is being met?**

   The voluntary reduction target is met if actual water use is at least 10 percent less than what we were anticipating without voluntary curtailments. We determine this by comparing the amount of water supplied since requesting voluntary curtailments to

the 2015 seasonal projection of water supply needs for the same period. These projections assume no water use reductions and continued warm, dry conditions such as we have experienced this year.

5. **My household has already implemented the tips for the Voluntary Stage. We cannot reduce our consumption by another 10 percent without significant hardship. I don't think there are other actions we can take.**

   While many customers can reduce their water use by 10 percent at this time, SPU recognizes that some customers, on their own initiative, have already reduced consumption. We applaud and thank you for your efforts. This request for consumption reduction will have some customers continuing efforts, while others will begin conserving more. Every bit helps, so we do ask all customers to consider appropriate actions from the Voluntary Tips. We also hope that you will encourage your neighbors, family and friends to reduce their water use by 10 percent. We will be reporting water use reductions for the whole region so that everyone can see how we are doing collectively.

6. **I believe our region should be reducing water usage beyond the 10 percent you are asking of customers and I want to conserve more. How can I save even more water in my household?**

   Thank you for wanting to do more. While we are highlighting our top tips, there are dozens of actions residents and businesses can do to reduce their demand. The more actions you implement, the more you can reduce your demand, even beyond the 10 percent goal. Visit www.savingwater.org for all the ways you can save water.

7. **When was the last time the WSCP was activated, and to what stage?**

   In terms of water supply, every year is unique and has its own factors that may or may not lead to activating the WSCP. This history is not meant to give anything other than a general understanding of how often the WSCP has been activated. It cannot, for example, be used to estimate the frequency of activating the WSCP in the future.

   - 1987 – Mandatory (Stage 3)
   - 1992 – Mandatory (Stage 3)
   - 2001 –Voluntary (Stage 2)
   - 2002 –Voluntary (Stage 2)
   - 2005 –Advisory (Stage 1)

8. **Is SPU doing its part to save water?**

   Yes, SPU is doing is part to save water and is taking the following actions:

1. Flushing water mains only when specifically needed to maintain drinking water quality, based on regulatory requirements and water quality sampling results.
2. Fixing water main leaks as soon as possible to reduce the amount of water that is lost.
3. Using only the minimum amount of water needed to test the accuracy of new water meters.
4. Holding off on cleaning treated water storage reservoirs and tanks, except as needed to maintain drinking water quality.
5. Not adding additional makeup water to Volunteer Reservoir, which is disconnected from the drinking water system, but maintained as an aesthetic component of Volunteer Park.
6. Turning off the fountain at our operations center.

Also, SPU is coordinating closely with other City Departments, notably the Parks Department, to do their part in saving water.

**9. What is the breakdown of your customer base?**

SPU's retail service area has about 20,000 commercial and 170,000 residential water customers. For SPU's retail and wholesale customers, approximately 48 percent of the water sold is to single-family residences, 20 percent to multi-family residences, and the remaining 32 percent to commercial customers.

**10. Why was the "Voluntary Stage" of the plans activated?**

Water supply conditions constantly change based on river and reservoir conditions, current and forecasted weather, customer water demand, forecasted water supply conditions, and other factors. We review and update these forecasts frequently, and the most current forecasts indicate the need for our customers to continue reducing their water use, which will increase our supply for people and for fish in the next months until fall rains return.

**11. How will reducing water use by 10 percent address the potential water shortage situation? For example, will it buy us an extra week of supply? Two weeks? A day?**

The water supply conditions are highly variable and dependent on weather. Given that variability, it's difficult to give a precise answer to the question. However, we can estimate that a 10 percent reduction in water use would equate to about 15 million gallons per day, given current water use rates. That is a substantial amount that will help extend the water supply.

**12. Does Seattle have enough water for the summer and into the fall?**

Seattle has sufficient water for the summer and into the fall when it typically begins to rain significantly in the watersheds. In the event that fall rains return late, it will be necessary to have additional water stored in our reservoirs, for people and for fish.

That is why we are asking customers to continue to reduce their water use now – just in case we need extra water for the fall and winter months until it starts to rain in our watersheds.

13. **If water consumption continues to drop by 10 percent or more, will Seattle's water supply be back to normal by the end of September? If not, what will it take to get back to normal?**

    A 10 percent reduction in water use makes a big difference, and we are counting on our customers to continue to help us meet this ongoing goal. However, we do not expect water supply to return to normal until after there is significant rainfall in our watersheds. In the meantime, SPU continues to monitor and evaluate the City's water supply condition on a daily basis and share information with the public on how well the region is doing to reduce water use by 10 percent.

14. **If I reduce my water consumption by 10 percent, can I expect to see a reduction in my water bill?**

    In general, reducing the amount of water that you use in your home will lower your water bill. The specific amount of savings will vary from customer to customer, depending on the current amount of water used and the amount of reduction in water use. Please visit our website to learn more about how your water bill is calculated.

15. **Why did the region choose 10 percent? That doesn't seem like a lot – why aren't you asking customers to reduce their water use by 20 or 30 percent?**

    First, our customers have already been key partners is using water wisely over the past several decades. In the 1980s summertime use of water used to peak at more than 300 million gallons per day; it now peaks at around 200 million gallons per day, despite substantial population growth since the 1980s.

    Second, a 10 percent reduction in water use is consistent with what is called for in the "Voluntary Stage" of our Water Shortage Contingency Plan. If conditions worsen, we may move to the "Mandatory Stage" of the plan and require that customers reduce their water use by a greater percentage, but we're not there yet.

16. **What is SPU doing to ensure that all communities in Seattle are aware of the potential water shortage and know what they should be doing to help?**

    SPU translated water supply materials into multiple languages and is partnering with underserved communities to help deliver information to residents who may not hear our ads and reports on radio, see information on TV or go to our website or newspapers for information. We strongly encourage our customers to share information with their neighbors, family, friends and co-workers and urge them to reduce their water use.

17. **Every couple of weeks, it seems like Seattle is reporting something different and asking customers to do something different. Why does the city's water supply forecasting and messaging keep changing?**

There are multiple factors (forecasted and current weather, customer water demand, reservoir inflows, river flows, hydraulic modeling results and system operations) that help the City determine its water supply outlook. These factors change on a daily to weekly basis, which means we have to be flexible and adaptable in our outlook.

**18. I'm worried about our fish population. What is SPU doing to protect fish during this drought?**

SPU continues to release water from its reservoirs to help augment stream flows for fish on the Cedar and South Fork Tolt Rivers. This provides protection for rearing salmon and steelhead trout, as well as returning adult spawning salmon.

**19. What should customers do now to help?**

We are in Stage 2 of the plan — the Voluntary Stage. Everett, Seattle and Tacoma customers are being asked to voluntarily reduce their water use by 10 percent. Here are some ways customers can reduce their water use both indoors and outdoors.

**Outdoor Tips:**

- Let your lawn go dormant and limit plant watering to twice a week.
- Water plants before 8am (best) or after 7pm.
- Wash your vehicle(s) at locations that recycle the water.
- Do only essential pressure washing.
- Minimize refilling swimming pools and hot tubs.
- Turn off water features.
- Fall is the best time for planting.

**Indoor Tips:**

- Reduce your showering time.
- Check for and fix leaks.
- Wash only full loads of laundry and dishes.
- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth or shaving.
- Don't pre-rinse dishes.
- If purchasing fixtures/equipment, choose water-efficient models.

**Commercial Tips:**

- Encourage reduced showering times at your facilities.
- Serve water only on request.
- Check for and fix leaks.
- Wash only full loads of laundry and dishes.
- Provide new towels only on request.
- Check cooling towers for overflow and excessive blowdown.
- If purchasing fixtures/equipment, choose water-efficient models.

Additional water saving tips are available at savingwater.org.

**20. If you are concerned about a possible water shortage now, why are you waiting to implement mandatory conservation measures?**

We have moved to the next stage of the plan – "Voluntary" – because the potential for a future water shortage has increased. We would implement mandatory reduction measures (Stage 3 of our Water Shortage Contingency Plan) if the potential increases to the point at which mandatory reductions are needed.

**21. How important is the reduction of demand in comparison to the arrival of the rain?**

Our customers are key partners in making sure there is enough of this precious resource to last until the return of fall rains. Water-use reductions will help stretch water supplies, but the return of fall rains will replenish available supplies.

**22. When did you first know there could be a possible water shortage? Specific date, please. Why didn't you implement the water shortage plan back when you first realized that? How many gallons could have been saved if you had acted earlier?**

We constantly monitor and operate our water supply and use hydrologic models to forecast our water supply outlook. Since May, when our reservoirs were filled successfully and the outlook was "good," unusually hot and dry conditions have caused continued shifts in the water supply outlook to the current point at which we activated our Water Shortage Contingency Plan in July and have moved to the voluntary stage of the plan.

**23. Why didn't SPU start asking for water reductions earlier when the utility came out and said water supply was "fair?" You didn't mention a water shortage then. What—specifically—has changed since then? Were you excessively confident, given what you're saying now?**

We constantly monitor and operate our water supply and use hydrologic models to forecast our water supply outlook. Since May, when our reservoirs were filled successfully and the outlook was "good," unusually hot and dry conditions have caused continued changes in the water supply outlook to our current status.

**24. We're in the voluntary stage now. How do we determine whether we need to move to the mandatory stage?**

SPU is constantly monitoring our water supplies and our system demands. We are also coordinating with local, state, federal and tribal agencies interested in the management of river flows and fisheries, and together making decisions to optimize the use of water resources. If the continued analysis of this data shows that a further reduction in demands is needed to meet the needs of our customers, or the rivers, we will move to the next step in the WSCP, which is a mandatory reduction in water use.

**25. What is the Water Shortage Contingency Plan?**

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) has a Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP), which provides guidelines for SPU to manage water supply and demand when there's a

potential or actual water shortage. The plan has four stages that may be phased in over time:

- Stage 1: Advisory Stage
- Stage 2: Voluntary Stage
- Stage 3: Mandatory Stage
- Stage 4: Emergency Curtailment Stage

**26. What's the difference between the four stages?**

- The advisory stage lets customers know that the potential exists for a water supply shortage and that customers should be especially thoughtful in their use of water.
- The voluntary stage asks for support from customers to decrease water usage to meet consumption goals for both residential and commercial users.
- The mandatory stage could implement limitations or prohibitions on certain actions which would be enforceable and punishable with fines for repeated violations.
- The emergency stage would only be implemented in the event of a critical water shortage threatening public health and safety. This type of situation has never occurred in the Seattle's history. At this stage, SPU would be authorized to require increasingly stringent water use restrictions, and to establish rate surcharges designed to reduce water demand.

**27. SPU has a reputation for having a strong water conservation program. What's the difference between what you are now asking of customers versus your ongoing water conservation program?**

**28. You say SPU monitors water supply carefully. What is involved with this?**

We measure precipitation, stream flows, reservoir storage, water consumption and more. This gives a snapshot that we review on a daily basis.

We also look at historical trends and use complex hydrologic models that can help project reservoir elevations and river flows, taking into account reservoir inflow, water use for people and fish, and other factors.

**29. You mention flexibility in the water supply system. Can you talk about this? And what about fish habitat?**

Seattle is fortunate to have two main sources of drinking water—the South Fork Tolt and the Cedar Rivers.

In addition, we are taking several actions which include preparing pumps that can help access billions of additional gallons of water at our Chester Morse Lake Reservoir in the Cedar River watershed and turning on the city's well field north of Sea-Tac Airport.

All of this gives us some flexibility in how we manage our water supply.

## QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO SEATTLE CITY LIGHT

**Q. Will the drought mean Seattle City Light won't have enough power?**

A. Seattle City Light's largest hydroelectric dams are located in northeast Washington and the North Cascades where conditions have not been as severe. The utility has managed its resources effectively and will have more than enough power to meet its customers' electricity needs.

**Q. Is this going to cause higher electricity prices?**

A. Seattle City Light does not anticipate any change in electricity prices as a result of this summer's drought.

**Q. Should I conserve power anyway?**

A. It's always a good idea to be conscious of your energy usage. It saves you money and reduces pressure on the utility to develop new energy resources. For information on energy conservation, visit http://www.seattle.gov/light/conserve/ or call an Energy Advisor at 206-684-3800.