



**2022/2023 Rate Advisory Committee (RAC)**

**Member Questions & Answers**

1) Can you provide an overview of how many TVWD customers currently get some form of rate assistance to better understand the current scope and scale of emergency and bill assistance?

➤ **Answer:** Due to COVID-19, this is not a simple answer. See the question #9 , which answered the question, “Number of customers on assistance in the 3 months following a rate increase.” If you want specific information for another time frame, we need to know what this is before proceeding.

2) How many customers were disconnected/shut off due to non-payment in 2019? (a longer time period may be better. I’m saying 2019 because it was not affected by moratoriums)

2019 Shut-off Count by Month												
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
667	494	379	556	454	437	460	441	570	446	332	469	<b>5705</b>

3) Are some customers required to pay a deposit to establish water service?

➤ **Answer:** No

4) What is the time period from bill due date to disconnection if a customer does not pay? What type of notices are sent out?

➤ **Answer:** Disconnections are suspended during the implementation and conversion to the new billing system. The District stopped disconnecting customers for non-payment in April 2022, and the timing to resume disconnections has not been determined. Before resuming disconnections, outreach occurs for at least one full two-month billing cycle, where customers are offered assistance and payment arrangements. Customers can avoid having their services disconnected by calling the District and making alternative payment arrangements. The scheduled billing cycle is:

- Bill due: 14 days after issue
- Reminder notice: 28 days
- Urgent Notice: 40 days
- Urgent Call Notice: 45 days
- Disconnect: 47 days



5) Did your contracted low-income needs assessment (EJ Metrics) provide any data on average water usage/bills of low-income households specifically?

➤ **Answer:** No. The analysis conducted by EJ Metrics is based on “water needs” rather than water usage. The specific needs used for the analysis were 50 gallons per capita per day. Therefore, a 3-person household’s essential needs were 150 gallons per day, or about 4,500 gallons per month (or, about 6 CCF; a CCF is a hundred cubic feet). There is no data source available to cross-reference customer bills with income levels.

6) Can you provide any data on water usage at higher percentiles of the usage spectrum (e.g. how high are water bills for the top 20% users)? (Affordability needs to take into account low-income customers with higher water bills, for instance due to less efficient houses or job requirements)

➤ **Answer:** TVWD currently doesn't have information that correlates water usage and income; however, we plan to use our GIS resources to map water usage by census tract and use American Community Survey data as a proxy for income.

7) Could the affordability calculations be redone for 1 and 2 person households? These types of households tend to have much less discretionary income. If not, could you provide the average water bill for such 1 and 2 person households?

➤ **Answer:** The Hours Minimum Wage (HM) calculation could be redone for 1 or 2-person households; the outcome would be fewer hours than those shown during the 2<sup>nd</sup> RAC meeting because the total bill would be lower due to less water usage vs. the same hourly wage used in the equation. The AR20 calculation could only be redone with additional analysis by EJ Metrics. However, EJ Metrics is no longer available as a resource for the District due to competing time commitments.

➤ **Answer:** The District cannot provide the average water bill for such 1 and 2-person households because the District does not have records of household size for its customers.

8) Number of delinquent accounts the three months following a rate increase

➤ **Answer:** Historically the District increases its water rates on Nov. 1 of each year. The District bills bimonthly (i.e., every other month), so the counts presented below also alternate every other month when the bill cycles are due (e.g., Dec. 2013 matches with February 2014, two months later).



9) Number of customers on assistance in the 3 months following a rate increase

Shutoffs After Nov. 1 Rate increase										
Rate Increase Nov 1	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
December		571	438	620	503	379	537	464	1419	1052
January	604	497	485	831	683	663	468	364	1298	927
February	413	405	363	604	439	430	621	396	1267	508

**Shut-off List Notes:**

- Counts include customers who have arrearages aged long enough to be on the shutoff list.
- Data does not reflect actual shutoffs. Customers can pay, enter into payment arrangements, or apply for assistance to avoid shutoffs.
- The District does not do shutoffs in December.
- Since COVID began in March 2020, shutoffs were conducted for five bi-monthly billing cycles (July 2021 through the April 2022). The District suspended cutoffs due to the pandemic from March 2020 to July 2021 and because of a billing system conversion initiative starting in April of 2022.

**Answer:**

TVWD Customer Emergency Assistance Program Counts			
	Jan	Feb	Dec
2013			
2014			
2015			31
2016	13	20	13
2017	13	9	13
2018	18	11	12
2019	10	16	10
2020	13	19	0
2021	0	0	12
2022	21	8	
		Data not available	

**Notes:**

- Several utility assistance programs were offered during the COVID pandemic.
- The funding for these COVID-related assistance programs came from various federal funding packages, some of which were provided through county and state agencies.
- While state and federal COVID relief programs (which covered water, wastewater, and stormwater utility bills) were available, TVWD's Customer Emergency Assistance Program was not offered.
- Due to the variance in funding, the number of programs offered during pandemic, and not using shutoffs consistently the data isn't comparable through this entire time period.

10) Other assistance programs:

➤ **Answer:**

- CARES Utility Assistance Program, which the Washington County Commissioners funded. The program offered bill forgiveness to customers from all Washington County water utilities: drinking water, waste/storm water. Details are in the table below.
- LIHWA – federal funded \$902,000 for utility assistance (water, waste/storm) for Washington County residents.
- OERAP – Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance program also paid utility bills.
  - TVWD doesn’t have data about LIHWA or OERAP in terms of customers who received the assistance, how much they may have received, or the total amount of assistance distributed by each program.
- ARPA funding – Washington County also provided \$2 million for utility assistance (water, waste/storm) for Washington County residents in July 2022. These funds were directly applied to account balances in specific census tracts (based on population and population of low-income residents). TVWD’s customers received \$644,000 of payments (combined), of which \$308,000 was for water service. Customers received letters and could opt out, which resulted in only two customers opting out.
- Community funded utility assistance is provided by: Beaverton Resource Center, Care to Share, St. Vincent DePaul, Salvation Army and other miscellaneous social service providers.

<b>CARES Assistance Program ROUNDUP</b>	<b>Washington County</b>	<b>TVWD*</b>	<b>Rounded percentage</b>
# of Payments pledged	1,114	480	43%
Total of payments Pledged	\$540,565.38	\$278,850.72	52%
Average Payment	\$485.24	\$580.94	n/a
# of Payments \$1000 or larger	96	59	61%

\*Note: TVWD bills jointly with Clean Water for most customers.

- 27% of the TVWD customers with past due arrearages were served by the CARES Act Utility Assistance program. At the end of CARES, on December 31, 2020, arrearages totaled \$763,628 for TVWD and \$515, 235 for Clean Water Services, and the customer count matching these totals was 1,815. The table above shows 1,419 of TVWD shutoff list. This may be due to clean water only accounts, which can’t be shut off or a variation in the parameters used to create the report. Arrearage totals includes all account types, some of which can’t be shutoff (fireline/clean water only).



11) At the first RAC meeting, I believe it was mentioned that many residential customers cannot be identified because they didn't receive water bills. Would you mind reminding me about this data?

- **Answer:** Yes, we're happy to remind you of what was shared. We shared that the Customer Assistance Program (CAP) would only apply to single-family residential customers because those residences have individual meters and each of them receive a bill from TVWD. We know there are - 56,376; however, we also shared the CAP would not apply to multi-family customers – it's not because we can't identify them but because individual dwelling units do not receive a bill from TVWD, rather the bill goes to their landlords because it is affiliated with the building water meter. TVWD knows there are 1,082 multi-family accounts, but the District has no way to know how many dwelling units are occupied or vacant—or the number of people living within occupied multi-family units or complexes—at any given time. Moreover, the District could not realistically administer a CAP for those individual dwelling units because they don't receive a bill to begin with, so there is not a direct link between TVWD and the dwelling unit resident.
- Census data about renter vs. owner households for Washington County tells us that 60% of all households are owners, 40% are renters. This information was used to help estimate the number of potential customers a CAP might expect, at a maximum, to qualify for the proposed program.

12) Delinquent accounts: What percentage of the shutoffs are repeats?

**Answer:** The District doesn't currently track this information. The shutoff process hasn't been used since April 2022.

13) TVWD Assistance Programs:

A. Emergency assistance program counts: There are very few customers (30-40 per quarter?) using this program? Why? Lack of demand? Too difficult to enroll?

- **Answer:** The District doesn't know for certain why customers do not enroll or apply for assistance.
- **Answer:** Some factors influencing recent participation include:
  - The District's assistance programming was paused when other federal and state programs are/were available to preserve customer funds. All the federal programs included water, and waste and stormwater services—while TVWD's customer funded program is limited to providing drinking water assistance.
  - The District changed our nonprofit partner and the benefit amount during COVID, increasing the benefit from \$65 to over \$200 per year. During COVID, state and federal



programs were significantly more generous with some completely retiring arrearages (an amount of money owed that should have been paid earlier).

- The District program wasn't offered when the state/federal offers were available, which would lower customer participation in our program.
- Suspending shutoffs impacts the urgency to apply for assistance. Shutoffs have only been performed from July 2021-April 2022 since March 2020.
- Nationally, participation in income -qualified programs is low.

Reference presentations, and the information provided to answer question 9 for additional information:

- <https://www.tvwd.org/district/page/2022-rate-advisory-committee-session-1>
- <https://www.tvwd.org/district/page/2022-rate-advisory-committee-session-2>

#### B. Deferred Payment Plans: How many customers participate? Trends?

- **Answer:** The report from the new billing system is under construction. The customers currently on deferred payment plans include customers on payment arrangements prior to April 2022, or customers who voluntarily requested one between then and now. Customers on repayment arrangements will increase when we resume shutoffs because entering into a repayment plan is one of the terms to receive customer assistance and/or avoid a service shutoff.

#### 14) TVWD Assistance Program Funding:

##### A. Of the \$41K spent for the 2019-2021 budget cycle, what was the split between emergency funds and deferred payment plans?

- **Answer:** The funds budgeted for the Customer Emergency Assistance Program are designated only for that program. Deferred payment plans do not receive funds from the District. Essentially, deferred payment plans stretch the repayment period and do not use resources allocated to the assistance program.

##### B. Of the district funded \$500K budget for 2021-2023, a) what is the spend pattern thus far and b) how was this budget determined?

- **Answer to Question A:** The Customer Emergency Assistance Program has been activated and deactivated, whenever other assistance programs were available. Throughout COVID the following programs were offered at various points in time:
  - CARES Utility Act
  - Low Income Household Water Assistance
  - Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance Program



- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

These programs were considered primary when they were in effect, so TVWD Customer Assistance Funds were paused to preserve resources.

- **Answer to Question B:** The \$500,000 funding amount was selected to approximately match the program being proposed by the District's billing partner, Clean Water Services (CWS). The goal was to integrate the two assistance programs to provide an incentive for customers to become current on both their TVWD and CWS bills. CWS was unable to implement its program because of coordination requirements with some of the cities within its service area. Rather than rely on its proposed customer assistance program, CWS was successful in pursuing federal funds through Washington County described above (both CARES and ARPA.)