

**TO: WTCPUA Board of Directors**

**FROM: Don Rauschuber, WTCPUA General Manager**

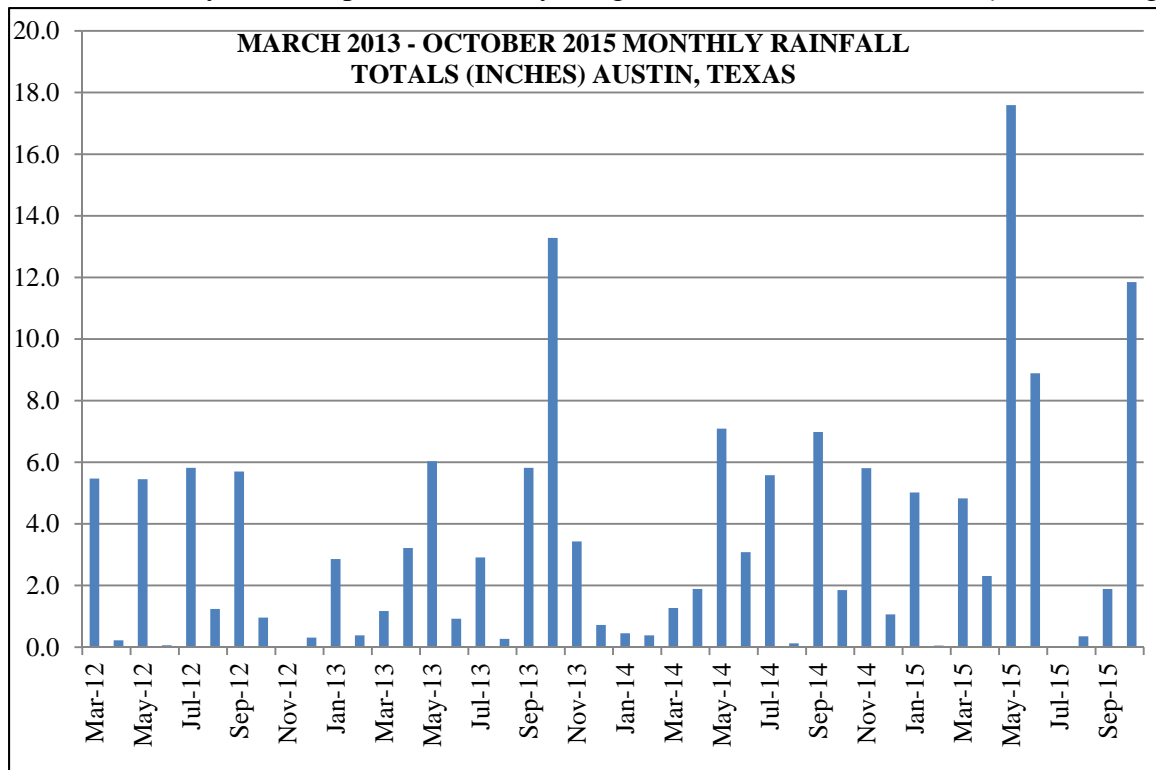
**DATE: November 19, 2015**

**RE: Customer Complaints: High Water Use/High Billings –**

**Background** - West Travis County Public Utility Agency (PUA) experienced a significant increase in water use in its service territory from July through October 2015. The increased water use resulted due to reestablished Stage 2a Water Restrictions in June 2015 that allowed for twice a week—instead of once a week watering allowed during the previous 2 years under 2b Water Restrictions.

The change in water restrictions was implemented due to heavy spring rains and rising lake levels. However, spring rains were followed by trace precipitation in July, August, September, and into October.

The entire system experienced very high water use *immediately* following



implementation of twice a week watering.

**Customer Complaints** - The PUA administrative and customer service offices commenced receiving customer complaints about high water use/high water billings in early September 2015, following the issuance of Rate District 231 (i.e., Bee Cave Service Area) bills. These complaints came in the form of telephone calls and emails, with some customers calling multiple times. The main concerns from customers and alleged causes include:

<b>CUSTOMER CONCERNS</b>	<b>ALLEGED CAUSES</b>
Higher Than Expected Water Use	Billing Errors, Faulty Water Meter, Faulty Computer Data Upload System, Leaky Pipes/Plumbing, High Pressure
Higher Than Expected Payment, Despite Comparable/Adjusted Historical Use to Previous Billing Periods	Billing Errors, High Water Rates, Faulty Computer Data Upload System,

During the period September 15, 2015 through November 12, 2015, the PUA received a total of 390 customer high use/high bill call-in, electronic and mailed-in complaints. This represents about 6% of the PUA’s total number of retail accounts. All customer complaints originated from residential customers. No high use/high bill complaints were received from commercial, multi-family, irrigation only, or HOA customers.

<b>WEST TRAVIS COUNTY PUBLIC UTILITY AGENCY</b>			
<b>CALL-IN CUSTOMER COMPLAINT METRICS 9/15/15 - 11/12/15</b>			
<b>District</b>	<b>Accounts</b>	<b>Complaints</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>231 Bee Cave</b>	2,697	201	7.5%
<b>237 Bee Cave S.</b>	1,859	48	2.6%
<b>466 Homestead</b>	158	2	1.3%
<b>477 HPR 290</b>	2,233	160	7.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,947</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>5.9%</b>

Although the PUA received no high use/high bills complaints from HOAs, a review of their accounts reveals that six of the seven top HOA irrigation water users also experienced a “spike” in water use in August and September 2015. The exception was Rocky Creek HOA. The eight HOAs shown on the table below collectively have 39 irrigation meters and have total water use equivalent to almost 670 LUEs (i.e., approximately 10% of the PUA’s retail water LUEs.)

**WEST TRAVIS COUNTY PUBLIC UTILITY AGENCY  
IRRIGATION WATER USE (1,000 GALLONS) FOR SELECTED HOMEOWNER  
ASSOCIATIONS**

MON/YR	SPANISH OAKS	UPLANDS	LADERA	BELVEDERE	RIM ROCK	ROCKY CREEK	HIGHPOINTE	TOTAL
9/14	3,304	28	377	249	209	100	1,221	5,488
10/14	1,893	25	355	295	167	143	1,736	4,614
11/14	936	24	152	55	32	46	334	1,579
12/14	964	0	90	38	44	2	423	1,561
1/15	726	0	57	27	47	0	480	1,337
2/15	293	0	54	15	40	1	855	1,258
3/15	141	0	49	1	87	30	881	1,189
4/15	289	1	52	1	201	70	658	1,272
5/15	1,038	6	386	125	240	101	944	2,840
6/15	708	8	337	137	88	99	813	2,190
7/15	1,084	26	107	185	222	124	1,525	3,273
8/15	3,368	66	395	216	544	121	1,079	5,789
9/15	6,531	49	804	691	412	149	2,471	11,107
LUEs	367	3	45	27	40	18	168	669

The same trending holds true for the PUA’s wholesale water customers. The PUA did not receive any “spiking” water use complaints from our wholesale customers, although they experienced the same spike in water use.

**WEST TRAVIS COUNTY PUBLIC UTILITY AGENCY  
WTCPUA WHOLESALE CUSTOMER WATER USE (1,000 GALLONS)**

Mon/Yr	Reunion Ranch	Senna Hills	TCMUD 12	TCMUD 18	BCW	Crystal Mountain	DSWSC	Eanes ISD	Hays 1	Hays 2	Deer Creek	Lazy Nine
9/14	3,710	11,260	9,939	615	13,078	1,792	19,229	690	18,018	11,534	5,070	9,496
10/14	3,470	7,068	6,256	169	7,114	968	7,912	523	10,420	7,189	3,328	4,838
11/14	3,270	6,964	5,435	488	4,034	1,142	6,706	648	10,148	4,262	3,563	4,306
12/14	1,233	4,933	6,455	537	1,314	563	7,081	682	6,772	4,022	3,087	3,770
1/15	1,010	4,315	6,132	488	12,176	429	7,334	546	7,622	2,675	2,656	3,290
2/15	910	4,521	5,104	695	5,248	424	10,537	405	6,226	3,397	2,771	3,181
3/15	702	4,372	2,729	248	3,676	327	10,981	822	6,369	2,885	2,808	3,562
4/15	1,399	5,097	3,711	860	5,152	618	11,005	310	9,341	4,654	3,055	4,680
5/15	1,809	5,479	4,139	575	4,452	497	12,660	500	9,062	4,604	5,282	4,649
6/15	1,868	4,985	4,460	645	5,294	582	16,608	566	8,291	4,231	1,704	4,653
7/15	2,356	7,776	4,930	835	6,383	777	12,912	223	11,028	6,359	3,272	5,428
8/15	4,161	11,243	12,375	1,732	13,428	2,024	25,564	748	20,736	12,516	6,829	9,553
9/15	6,491	12,441	13,239	3,204	14,937	1,868	29,880	977	23,017	11,004	6,391	11,022

**Preliminary Determinations and Contributing Factors** – There are several possible causes for which customer bills could have reflected higher than expected use/higher billings. These include billing errors, a faulty water meter, or customer-side plumbing failure. The PUA will continue to identify and resolve these individual cases, however there is no indication that the recent widespread customer concerns are attributable to these potential causes on a large-scale basis.

The PUA and USWUG have investigated whether or not we have a large systematic error, such as missed/miss-read meters, computer upload/download problem or billing errors. We have found that current evidence of a widespread systematic problem within the USWUG customer service system does not exist.

PUA and USWUG staff believes this is a weather related/outdoor irrigation problem. Outdoor water usage is the single biggest demand for water each summer. For most water customers that have outdoor-landscape irrigation systems, over 70% to 80% of their water use is associated with landscape irrigation demands. Another factor that influences a customer water use is related to swimming pools. During summer months with high temperatures, elevated wind velocity and low humidity, swimming pools high evaporative loss and water loss associated with splashing. It is well documented that yearly customer water usage closely follows weather patterns: when weather conditions turn hot and dry, water demand significantly goes up – not likely from uses inside of the home but more likely from lawn irrigation and other outdoor uses. Compared to the last 3 ½ years, summer usage levels we are now seeing are not out-of-the norm given the fact that the PUA under 1 per week outdoor watering restriction for almost 2 years during this period. What is different this year is the weather pattern leading into this summer: a mild, wet March, April, May and June, followed by 75 consecutive dry days with near 100-plus temperatures.

**Other Indicators/Trends** – The PUA’s water customers were not the only customer group that experienced a spiking in high water use/high billings in the last few months. As mentioned above, all of the PUA’s wholesale customers (and their retail customers) experienced a spike in water consumption. As documented in recent media releases, Austin, Cedar Park, Leander, Round Rock and numerous other Central Texas water utilities experienced the same phenomenon. In fact, most Texas water utilities like Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio have experienced same water spiking/billing situation.

With specific attention to the PUA, we have diverted more raw water from Lake Austin and produced more treated water in the last few months than in the history of the West Travis County Regional Water System. This is further evidenced in the fact that we have used more electrical energy than ever before.

During the spiking period, the PUA had a very difficult time from an operational standpoint. USWUG operators had difficulty in producing enough water from our treatment plant to replenish treated water ground and elevated storage tanks while meeting high-hourly water demands we experienced within our water system. In fact, for the first time in the PUA’s history we set a new maximum day demand of about 14.5 mgd and had instantaneous flow production rates through the water plant of over 13,300 gpm (i.e., daily rate of 20 mgd). This instantaneous high production rate coincided with system irrigation demands placed on our water system by residential, commercial, multi-family, HOAs, and wholesale customers between the hours of midnight to 7 a.m.

**Conclusions** – The PUA does not have a system-wide metering, billing or computer data collection problem. The PUA has an irrigation water demand problem. We must evaluate how we produce and distribute water to our customers and eliminate system bottlenecks and improve system efficiencies.

The PUA takes any and all customer complaints seriously, and we understand customer frustration associated with unanticipated usage and/or high bill amounts. The PUA and customer service staff is committed to reviewing every bill concern to ensure accurate billing and correct any potential errors. Customer service personnel receive and facilitate calls every day. This most recent instance of customer concerns has involved a concerted effort to evaluate the concerns, investigate complaints and determine the most appropriate outcome for each customer. PUA staff and customer service are still in the process of evaluating individual customer complaints. The process is time intensive. Staff estimates that it may require another 30 to 60 days to address and resolve each customer complaint/inquiry.