

Consumer Rights

- ◆ If you have a complaint about your water service, you must first attempt to resolve the dispute with your water company.
- ◆ Your water company is required to tell you about your right to file a complaint with the PUC and to give you our toll-free telephone number: 1-800-782-1110.
- ◆ Residential customers of water companies who are late paying must first call their company to attempt to make a payment agreement. If an agreement cannot be reached, the company must tell customers of their right to call the PUC.
- ◆ If you are on a limited income, ask your water company if they offer any customer-assistance programs.

Mission

The PUC recognizes that viable water systems are essential to strong Pennsylvania communities. The caliber of the water service directly impacts everyone's health, quality of life, and the community's overall economic development. The PUC strives to keep the larger, viable water systems sound while working to enhance those smaller systems in need.



**“When the well is dry, we
know the worth of water”
— Ben Franklin**

If you need to file a complaint with the
Public Utility Commission:



Call us

1-800-782-1110
TTY Dial 711, 800-782-1110
(for people with hearing or speech loss)



Visit our website

www.puc.state.pa.us



Or write

PA Public Utility Commission
Bureau of Consumer Services
P.O. Box 3265
Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265



- ◆ Ensuring safe, reliable water at reasonable rates
- ◆ Enforcing compliance with state and federal laws and regulations
- ◆ Encouraging regionalization to enhance viability for small water systems
- ◆ Educating water customers and promoting wise water usage

The Role of the PA PUC

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) regulates the rates and service of about 100 investor-owned water utilities, along with about 35 municipal water systems that serve customers outside their corporate boundaries.

The PUC provides a system of checks and balances between the interests of the ratepayers and investors. The PUC does not advocate for any one group. Decisions are made impartially, based on record evidence. The PUC enforces all applicable rules and regulations.

Challenges and Programs

Rates must be set to reflect all the prudently incurred costs of providing service, including those to cover today's added challenges: increasing water-quality standards, replacement of aging infrastructure, enhanced security, and development of new sources of supply. In recognition of meeting these challenges, the PUC relies on many programs, such as those listed below, to help water companies provide a high level of reliable service at a reasonable cost to ratepayers.

- ◆ **Infrastructure Upgrades** – The Distribution System Improvement Charge (DSIC) allows water companies to use the surcharge to fund more upgrades of aging infrastructure than would otherwise be feasible at a reasonable rate for customers. Pennsylvania was the first state in the nation to use the DSIC.
- ◆ **Affordability** – The PUC recognizes that some low-income residents may have difficulty paying their bills. The PUC encourages water companies to establish special assistance programs.

- ◆ **Stronger Water System Viability** – The PUC provides technical assistance to small systems that may have management, financial and operational challenges. The PUC uses regionalization to help consolidate the smaller, troubled systems into larger, well-run systems to improve customer service at a reasonable rate for the long term. The PUC also works with other agencies to help the most troubled small systems.

How the PUC Sets Water Rates

The PUC closely examines the reasonableness of a water company's request and determines whether expenses have been prudently incurred. The PUC's in-depth review includes analysis of adjusted claimed revenues, expenses, taxes, rate base (generally referring to the depreciated utility plant providing service to customers), cost of debt, rate of return, rate structure, and compliance with PUC rules and state regulations.

What's Included on Your Water Bill

- 1) The amount of water used;
- 2) A **customer charge** represents a flat charge to recover fixed costs, such as billing and meter reading;
- 3) A **volumetric charge** based on usage to recover variable costs to produce potable water, such as chemicals used in purification and energy consumed;
- 4) A **DSIC surcharge** is used by some companies to cover the costs of infrastructure upgrades;
- 5) A **PENNVEST surcharge** is used by some companies to repay a state low-interest loan for a major plant improvement; and
- 6) A **State Tax Adjustment Surcharge (STAS)** is used by a few companies to recover some state taxes.

Water Facts

- ◆ Pennsylvania has more than 83,000 miles of streams, nearly 4,000 lakes, 120 miles of coastal waters and about 80 trillion gallons of groundwater.
- ◆ In 1900, Pennsylvania residential water usage was approximately 5 gallons per person, per day. Today, residential use is approximately 62 gallons per person, per day.
- ◆ About 1 million Pennsylvania households rely on 450,000 individual wells in the Commonwealth; 10.5 million people rely on 2,100 community drinking water systems (which includes 100 investor-owned water utilities).
- ◆ The oceans and seas contain 97% of the earth's water; 2% is frozen in ice caps and glaciers. That leaves just 1% that is suitable for drinking water and all other personal and commercial uses.

Water Conservation Tips

- ◆ Check your home plumbing for leaks and fix them promptly to help save water and money.
- ◆ Take a shorter shower using a low-flow showerhead instead of taking a bath, and save water.
- ◆ Turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth or shaving.
- ◆ Use dishwashers and washing machines only with a full load.
- ◆ Install water-efficient appliances in your home.