Spring 2014

This is How We Roll!

Have you ever wondered how Fairfax Water provides two-and-a-half billion eight-ounce glasses of water to almost 2 million people every day? Well, it probably doesn’t keep you up at night, but we thought you might be interested in how Fairfax Water is governed and how we operate.

Fairfax Water was chartered in 1957 as an authority, which means we operate as a public, non-profit organization. We’re governed by a ten-member Board of Directors made up of Fairfax Water customers who are appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. The Board of Directors has the responsibility to set the direction and policies for Fairfax Water as well as establish rates, fees, and charges to keep it financially sound.

Fairfax Water’s Board of Directors typically meets the first and third Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in the Boardroom of the Fairfax Water offices at 8570 Executive Park Avenue, Fairfax, VA 22031. Notices of public hearings and other opportunities for public participation are posted in the lobby and on the Web site at www.fairfaxwater.org. If you plan to attend a meeting or need more information, call 703-698-5600, TTY 711, to confirm the date and time for the meeting.

As a non-profit public utility, Fairfax Water is mandated to charge only for the actual cost of providing water service to our customers. We conduct Cost of Service studies to evaluate this cost and look closely at population projections, average per capita water usage, and projected inflation rates when establishing rates, fees, and charges.

The general manager and his executive staff manage 400 employees who produce and distribute an average of 167 million gallons of water daily. Fairfax Water operates with

(continues on page 3)
Spring Cleaning at Fairfax Water

Spring cleaning at Fairfax Water is probably a little different than at your house. Each spring, we flush all of our water mains by opening fire hydrants and allowing them to flow freely for a short period of time.

This program has several benefits. First, it allows us to test all our hydrants to ensure they are working properly and to determine if they need maintenance or painting.

Second, during the spring flushing program, free chlorine is added during the treatment process instead of chloramines. Free chlorine is better suited to removing residue that may have collected in the pipes. You’ll find more information about chlorine on our Web site at www.fairfaxwater.org/current/free_chlorine.htm.

Removing the residue ensures that when the water arrives in your home, it is the same high quality as when it left the treatment plant. This spring flushing will not affect your water service.

You may notice more of a chlorine taste and odor in your drinking water during the spring flushing program. This is not harmful. Keeping an open container of drinking water in your refrigerator will allow the chlorine to dissipate. Be sure to change the water in your refrigerated container weekly.

If you have an aquarium or pond, always test the water you add to your aquatic environment to be sure it is free of chlorine before adding fish or other animals.

If you have questions about this program or the work being conducted in your area, call 703-698-5800, TTY 711, during business hours and after-hours, call 703-698-5613, TTY 711.

Spring Cleaning at Your House

While we are flushing the water mains, you too will probably be busy at your house with spring cleaning. We have some tips that may help you get ready for summer safely - and save water and the environment at the same time.

As you plan your landscaping this spring, consider shrubs and ground cover instead of turf for hard-to-water areas such as steep slopes and isolated strips. Use plants that are native to this area and require less watering. You can find a list of these in the Water Wise Landscaping and Watering Guide. The guide includes tips on planning and designing your landscaping, watering, lawn care, and improving your soil. You’ll find the guide on our Web site at www.fairfaxwater.org or call 703-289-6017, TTY 711, to request a copy by mail.

If your landscaping plans include digging on your property, be sure to call Miss Utility first. Miss Utility, also known as The Virginia Utility Protection Service, is the not-for-profit organization created by Virginia’s utilities to protect their underground facilities. One phone call can save you from the headache - and danger - of hitting a gas or water line. Just call 811, TTY 711 or 1-800-552-7001, TTY 711 before you dig. For more information, visit http://va811.com/homeowners/how-to-when-to/.

If you are emptying your swimming pool this spring, please remember to be fish friendly! If you drain your pool directly into a stream or storm drain, it may kill the fish, harm aquatic plants and animals, or cause stream-bank erosion and flooding. For information about safely emptying your pool, visit the Fairfax County Web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpws/stormwater/pooldischarge.htm or call the county’s Stormwater Planning Division at 703-324-5500, TTY 711. Commercial swimming pool operators should contact the Health Department at 703-246-2300, TTY 711.

Spring is a good time to consider a rain barrel. You can capture 420 gallons of rain water from 1,000 sq. ft. of roof surface. Rainwater can be used for outdoor plants and trees or to wash your car. Before you install a rain barrel, be sure to learn more about how to prevent mosquitoes from breeding, how to determine if the rain barrel water is safe to use on your garden, and how to secure your rain barrel to protect young children and animals. Two local organizations can help you learn more: The Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (NVSWCD), www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/rainbarrels.htm, 703-324-1460, TTY 711, and the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB), www.potomacriver.org/steward/barrels, 301-274-8107, TTY 711.
This is How We Roll! (continued)

10 percent fewer employees than the American Water Works Association’s (AWWA) top benchmark for water utilities.

The utility is divided into five divisions: Production, Transmission & Distribution, Finance, Information Technology, and Planning & Engineering. There are four additional departments in the general manager’s office: Human Resources, Security & Safety, Water Quality & Safety, and Public Affairs.

We draw raw water from two primary sources, the Potomac River and the Occoquan Reservoir, which is fed by the Occoquan River. Customers in our service area receive water from four treatment plants. Fairfax Water operates two of the treatment facilities: the James J. Corbalis Jr. and the Frederick P. Griffith Jr. Water Treatment Plants. The third and fourth treatment plants are the Dalecarlia and McMillan Water Treatment Plants operated by the Washington Aqueduct Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Fairfax Water is regulated by the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), enacted by Congress in 1974, to protect public health by regulating the nation’s public drinking water supply. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for establishing regulations under the SDWA and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is responsible for enforcing these standards for public water systems in Virginia.

At Fairfax Water we take pride in the quality of our water, which consistently surpasses rigorous state and federal standards. Our highly trained laboratory staff employs the latest and most sensitive and sophisticated analytical instrumentation to analyze 350 different compounds in our raw water sources and treated water.

Fairfax Water has instituted multiple technologies - biological, chemical, and physical – to monitor water quality. Raw-water sources and treated water are tested for organic and inorganic material, metals, and bacteria. The laboratory monitors aesthetic attributes such as the taste, color, and odor of treated water and works closely with the Customer Service Department to respond if customers have concerns about water quality. For more information about your water quality, visit www.fairfaxwater.org.

Glad You Asked!

Q. I received my water bill the last week of February. Enclosed was the winter issue of your newsletter, Straight From The Tap. On the back page was the feature “Mark Your Calendar” with eight events listed. Five of the events had transpired by the time I received my bill with the newsletter in it.

A. Confusion about the timing of our newsletter is understandable. We’re happy to have the chance to explain.

In order to save on postage costs, the newsletter is sent with your bill instead of being mailed to you separately. Because we bill on a quarterly basis, each issue of the newsletter is distributed over a period of three months. So this spring issue begins distribution the first week in March and continues through the end of May.

While this is the most economical way to provide the newsletter, as you can imagine it presents a challenge in terms of timing. For this reason, we always include dates up to six months out in our calendar. Even so, some of the dates on the calendar will have passed by the time those on the end of the billing cycle receive the newsletter.

We post the newsletter on our Web site as soon as it begins distribution with the bills. If you receive your bill later in the billing cycle and would like to see the newsletter earlier, each issue is posted on our Web site at www.fairfaxwater.org, usually by the 6th of December, March, June, and September. Click on News to Know in the left-hand column – links to all issues of the newsletter are at the bottom of the News to Know page.

If you have a question, concern, or compliment, contact us at pr@fairfaxwater.org or call 703-698-5600, TTY 711.
Kids’ Corner

Will It Sink or Float?

Here is a great experiment for little ones. First, gather a variety of objects around the house that you won’t mind getting wet. Next, prepare a recording sheet like this one or download a recording sheet here: www.themeasuredmom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Will-it-sink-or-float-recording-page.pdf. Then fill a bowl or pan with water - one large enough to fit each of the objects you found.

Write the name of each object on your recording sheet. Take turns guessing whether each item will sink or swim and then test your guess by placing each one individually into the water. Circle the correct answer next to each item on your recording sheet. See how many you can guess correctly. Do you know why some objects sink and others float? Find out why at http://easyscienceforkids.com/all-about-sink-and-float/.

Sources: www.themeasuredmom.com/ and http://easyscienceforkids.com/

Mark Your Calendar

Monday, May 26
Fairfax Water offices closed for Memorial Day

Saturday, May 17
River Fest on the Occoquan from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; 703-690-2121, TTY 711, or visit www.owlva.org or www.nvrpa.org

Fri., June 6 – Sun., June 8
Visit Fairfax Water’s exhibit for a free glass of ice water at Celebrate Fairfax! 703-324-3247, TTY 711, or visit www.celebratefairfax.com

Sunday, June 8
2014 Watershed-Friendly Garden Tour
703-324-1423, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/gardentour.htm

Friday, July 4
Fairfax Water offices closed for Independence Day

Monday, Sept. 1
Fairfax Water offices closed for Labor Day

Monday, Oct. 13
Fairfax Water offices closed for Columbus Day

Water-Saving Tip

Spring is a good time to put in new plants since cooler weather means they will not need as much water to thrive. Water plants in the morning to minimize evaporation. For more information and tips on saving water, visit www.mwccog.org/environment/water/watersupply/wisewater.asp.