

# THE WATERLINE

NEWS FROM THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO WATER DEPARTMENT

No. XXIII

Spring 2003

## ***Safety, security of water is Department's highest priority***

No public water system is completely safe, but the City of San Diego Water Department has taken tremendous precautions during the past few years to keep its systems as secure as possible.

Since the last 1990s, the Water Department has spent millions of dollars to upgrade security at its facilities. Many of the measures taken are visible, such as new fencing and guard posts at major facilities. The vast majority of the precautions, however, are hidden from the public and from anybody trying to compromise the city's water treatment and distribution systems.

"We've put forth a tremendous effort to safeguard our systems," said Water Department Director Larry Gardner. "Our facilities are

*Safety continued on back*

## **Monthly utility billing begins in September**

In an effort to help San Diegans balance their monthly budgets, the City of San Diego Water and Sewer Departments will begin billing on a monthly basis beginning in September 2003. Currently bills are sent out every other month.

"Both water rates and sewer rates are scheduled to increase during the next few years so bills will be increasing as well," explained Mike Bresnahan, Assistant Deputy Director of the Water Department's Customer Support Division. "We've heard from some customers, especially those on low or fixed incomes, that paying higher bills every other month can sometimes be difficult. Monthly billing should help our customers balance their monthly budgets as we'll be issuing 12 smaller, more manageable bills a year instead of six larger bills."

An important aspect of the new monthly billing program is that in order to keep additional costs at a minimum, and not have to hire new

personnel, the Water Department will continue to read the meters of our single-family domestic customers every other month.

This means there won't be an actual read each month so the Water Department will estimate every other bill based on historical usage. The following month the bill will be based upon an actual read of the meter. Any adjustments to the estimated bill (if the estimated bill was too high or too low) will occur on the months when the meter is physically read.

Customers who have their meter read in September will receive their normal bill in September for usage during the previous two months. Then, in October, they will receive an estimated monthly bill. In November, the meter will again be read and they'll receive a monthly bill which includes any adjustments made necessary by estimating the previous bill.

Customers who receive a bill in August will receive an estimated bill in

*Billing continued on back*

## **Conservation Garden is beautiful, educational**

Do you think that reducing your outdoor water usage means having your house surrounded by dirt and brown, dying plants? Do you think native, local plants can't require small amounts of water while being beautiful at the same time? A visit to the Water Conservation Garden at Cuyamaca College might just change your mind.

The Garden, which is cosponsored by the City of San Diego Water Department, offers a wide variety of plant species which thrive in our semi-arid environment. And they aren't tumbleweeds and dandelions.

"Healthy landscapes contribute to our quality of life, but we must always

*Garden continued on back*



*Visitors to the Water Conservation Garden learn that native plants don't have to be brown.*

## Safety continued

much better protected today than they were a decade ago."

The upgrading of security systems actually began prior to the millennium when there were thoughts that turning the calendar over to the year 2000 might pose problems for large systems such as the ones within the Water Department. Strengthening and upgrading computer hardware and software coincided with additional security measures at the Department's treatment plants, reservoirs and pump stations. After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, security again became one of the Department's highest priorities.

"Since 9/11 we've been in almost constant contact with local, state and federal authorities regarding the safety of our systems," said Gardner.

"There's a lot we can do on our own but the coordination of the law enforcement agencies really helps. If we see somebody suspicious near

one of our facilities, you can be sure that we notify both the local police department as well as the FBI. We take any and all threats, real or perceived, very seriously."

The Water Department asks all citizens of San Diego to be its eyes and ears in the community. Law enforcement officials can't be everywhere so if anybody sees something suspicious involving our drinking water supply, they're urged to report it as quickly as possible.

"It's not impossible to introduce something into our drinking water that shouldn't be there, but it would be difficult to do so and not attract some kind of attention," explained Gardner. "If, for instance, somebody is pumping or dumping something into one of our reservoirs somebody is bound to see it and if they notify the Police Department or the Water Department we can investigate very quickly. With everybody working together we can keep our water systems safe."

## Billing continued

September on the corresponding date. So, customers billed on August 15 will receive an estimated monthly bill on September 15. Then, in October their meter will be read and they will receive a monthly bill which includes any adjustments made necessary by estimating the previous bill.

"We realize there may be some questions and concerns about monthly billing during the first few months," said Bresnahan. "We want to assure all of our customers that we'll be here to help them answer all of their questions. Our Customer Service Representatives are highly trained and do a tremendous job. I encourage all customers to give them a call with any questions about monthly billing or anything else about your water or sewer bill."

Water Department Customer Service Representatives can be reached at (619) 515-3500.

## Garden continued

take into account our need to conserve water," said Dan Carney, a Landscape Architect at the Water Department. "It's not just about using less water, it's about using only what is necessary. It's important to know that if you use water wisely, you can grow a beautiful landscape that provides a number of positive benefits."

While this may not be the traditional water conservation message, the City of San Diego's Water Department recognizes individual preferences and wants to assist homeowners in achieving significant water savings through proper landscape maintenance. This doesn't necessarily mean replacing existing landscaping with rocks or cement.

"The key to healthy, efficient landscaping is to water it only as much as it needs it. Over-watering landscape is a waste of water and is what we would like to avoid, but efficiently watering landscaping benefits all of us," said Carney. "Plus, landscaping is good for the environment. Plants provide an environmental value that nothing else matches. For instance, a lawn of just 2,500 square feet absorbs carbon dioxide and releases enough oxygen into the atmosphere to meet the needs of a family of four."

While it may seem counter-

intuitive, there are ways to have vibrant landscaping while still conserving water. On display at the Water Conservation Garden are hundreds of species of plants which can make your yard look beautiful while helping you reduce your utility bill. The Water Garden has been designed to be a hands-on, backyard example of how xeriscape concepts can be directly applicable to San Diego area homeowners. A series of educational exhibits have been placed along three path loops. The Design Loop focuses on items which should be completed before a landscape is installed. Exhibits show how to design for function and aesthetics, planting preparation, installation techniques,

edible gardening, and planting to attract wildlife. The Maintenance Loop focuses on pruning, plant care, existing landscape rehabilitation, and container gardening, and the Irrigation Loop is intended to show the vast range in irrigation equipment which is now available, and how it can be used efficiently in landscape situations.

The Water Conservation Garden is located at 12122 Cuyamaca College Drive West in El Cajon. Parking and admission is free. You can reach the Garden by phoning (619) 660-0614, or visit the website on the internet at: [www.thegarden.org](http://www.thegarden.org). The City of San Diego Water Conservation Program can be reached at (619) 515-3500, or on the web at [www.sandiego.gov](http://www.sandiego.gov).

## Important Water Department numbers



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

To report a water line break or a sewer overflow .....	(619) 515-3525
To ask a question about your water or sewer bill .....	(619) 515-3500
To find out where you can pay your bill .....	(619) 515-3500
For Water Conservation Program information .....	(619) 515-3500
To establish or cancel water or sewer services .....	(619) 515-3500
To ask about San Diego's drinking water .....	(619) 668-3232
For Lakes Recreation Program information .....	(619) 465-3474
To schedule a presentation through the Speaker's Bureau .....	(619) 533-6638
To ask the location of a City water or sewer line .....	(619) 527-7482
Capital Improvements Projects Hotline .....	(619) 533-4679
San Diego City Lakes Hotline .....	(619) 465-3474
To report water theft from the Water Department .....	(619) 533-4146