



On the Water Front

February 2023 | A Message from John Balliew, P.E., President/CEO

EPWater prioritizes customer assistance

From the grocery store to the gas pump, essential costs of living are increasing. The price of water is no exception, as El Paso Water invests to boost our system reliability and our city's future water supply while the prices of energy, materials and services creep upward.



As other water utilities across the nation know, preserving affordability while facing a host of rising costs – linked to supply chain, labor shortages and inflation – is a challenge we all share.

Keeping water affordable.

Affordability for our low-income customers and seniors is always central to our discussions when debating changes in rates and fees. The Public Service Board asks the tough questions to protect consumers, and we are always seeking new solutions to ease the burden on those who are most vulnerable. As the result of partnerships and the diligence of our hard-working customer outreach staff, EPWater offers several affordability options to our customers.

Affordability resources

Through partnerships with local nonprofits Project Bravo and Amistad, about 5,700 customers received bill-paying assistance totaling more than \$1.6 million in 2022. These results dwarfed our 2020 numbers – with just over 2,500 receiving more than \$680,000 in customer assistance.

During the pandemic, Congress passed two major bills affecting affordability that were signed into law: the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act. Both provided federal funding to be allocated by states, cities or counties to help customers with water bills.

Project Bravo is managing a program created under ARPA called the **Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program**, which provides relief assistance to homeowners and renters whose services were terminated or received notification of a shutoff. LIHWAP, with funding available through August, is modeled after the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program Funding, which Project Bravo also manages.

We are working with water trade associations in the hopes of persuading Congress to extend LIHWAP, but even if this funding source dries up, we are committed to finding or creating other options to help our customers.

Since 2018, we have partnered with Amistad on the **AguaCares** program, which offers aid, money management and conservation services to low-income elderly customers struggling to pay their water and wastewater bills. Every customer of the water utility has the option to check a box on their water bill and make a contribution to AguaCares. Contributions **online** are also accepted. We thank the thousands of customers who contribute every year to that fund to help El Paso's low-income seniors.

Conservation saves

We also like to remind our customers of our Water Supply Replacement Charge, which is waived for customers using less than 4 CCFs (2,990 gallons) monthly. An average of 48,000 low-water users currently takes advantage of the waiver each month. Starting in March, the waiver amount will increase to \$14.04. This amount will be removed from your bill if your water usage falls below the threshold.



Conserving water can help you save.

Also, an increased water volume from 4 CCFs to 5 CCFs (3,740 gallons) will be included in the monthly minimum charge. This will result in an estimated 18,000 customers who may save \$6 a month. We want to reward our customers who understand the value of this precious resource and are doing their part to use less.

To help with conservation, we encourage customers to attend one of our many Tech₂O Learning Center **landscape workshops**, sign up for our **Conservation Currents** newsletter with seasonal tips or watch for the return of residential rebate programs in 2023.

As always, we emphasize that the key to affordability is conservation. We encourage and equip all our customers to make incremental reductions in water demand every year so they can save money and so we can save water for future generations. Please make every drop count, and you will see the savings on your water bill.



On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water.
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