

Frequently Asked Questions on Drinking Water Quality

Water quality has become a topic in the news lately due to a short-term water usage ban in Toledo in early August. Algae has been a growing concern in some of Ohio's lakes and waterways, and we wanted to inform our customers about the many efforts undertaken by the Columbus Division of Water to ensure water quality. Below are some frequently asked questions.

Are algal blooms a concern in central Ohio?

Algae is always present in surface water, but how much and what kind is what matters. Not all algae is toxic, but some types at higher levels can be, to humans and pets. Columbus monitors regularly for algal growth in its surface water reservoirs, along with other possible contaminants. When additional treatment beyond the robust treatment process already used is needed to deal with changing conditions in our source water, powdered activated carbon is added.

Could what happened in Toledo happen in Columbus?

While anything is possible, Columbus has more tools and options to meet an issue such as hazardous algal blooms. In addition to treatment and powdered activated carbon, we have flexibility through our varied water resources (Hoover, Griggs and O'Shaughnessy Reservoirs, a new upground reservoir, and wells); the ability to withdraw at different reservoir levels; and an expert algal research and monitoring program. Additionally, the city has been proactive in planning and will be bringing new treatment technologies online within the next few years at the Hap Cremean and Dublin Road water plants. These new technologies, including ozone and biologically active carbon filtration, will add to our treatment capabilities and also combat any taste and odor aspects that can occur with varied blooms, toxic or otherwise. The Parsons Avenue Water Plant relies on wells and is not affected by surface water challenges.

Does a different taste, odor or appearance indicate a water quality issue?

Generally, taste and odor is not a good indicator of a water quality problem; this is more perception than reality. Aesthetic changes could be a result of a non-harmful algal bloom, water temperatures, or salt runoff from roadways

in the winter. Cloudy water is more common in the winter due to colder ground temperatures. Bubbles can result simply from air in the water lines. Maintenance activities can result in temporary aesthetic changes to water. For example, rusty looking water may be a result of hydrant flushing and is not a health concern. If a health related water quality issue occurs, we are required by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to notify customers. The city would do that via the news media, social media and our Web site. If you notice anything different about your water, visit www.columbus.gov/WaterQualityConcerns/ or call the Water Quality Assurance Laboratory at 645-7691.



Are water quality reports available to customers?

The EPA requires that all water utilities distribute reports on source and treated water quality to their customers. Columbus not only meets all state and federal water standards set forth by the Safe Drinking Water Act, but often exceeds them. These reports were mailed to customers in June and can also be viewed on our Web site; look for the Consumer Confidence Report. Additional printed copies can be obtained by calling Customer Service at 645-8276.

Can residents help protect water quality?

While some issues of concern are often related to upstream agricultural activity, we all play a role in water protection. Some examples include: limiting lawn chemicals, picking up pet waste, reporting suspected hazardous spills on waterways, disposing of household hazardous waste properly, maintaining septic tank systems and fixing automotive leaks. Planting trees and deep rooted native plants can aid in naturally filtering pollutants that are often carried in stormwater that washes over the land as it travels to the nearest waterway. Please visit www.utilities.columbus.gov or www.columbus.gov/KeepItClean/ for more information.



Please join us on Facebook (Columbus Public Utilities) and Twitter (@cdpu)

Frequently Asked Customer Service Questions

Can you take my utility bill payment over the phone?

The Department of Public Utilities Customer Service Center is not set up to take credit card payments; however, we can transfer you to a third party vendor to process it, or you can call 1-800-824-2375 directly to make the payment. Bills can also be paid on our Web site at www.utilities.columbus.gov and in person at 910 Dublin Road and various other locations listed on our Web site.

Why is my bill so high?

Higher water consumption is generally what causes higher bills. However, other things can occur. If you don't know of a reason for an increase in usage like watering your lawn or a running toilet, please call Customer Service at 645-8276 for assistance.

Why does the city have a stormwater fee?

The stormwater utility fund pays for stormwater services like cleaning out clogged storm drains, ditches and capital improvement projects to alleviate neighborhood flooding.

What is the Clean Rivers charge?

These charges fund Ohio EPA mandated capital improvement projects to reduce sewer overflows into waterways and basement backups.

Where can I get info on the rain barrel program?

Please visit greenspotrainbarrels.org or call the Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District at 486-9613. It is a partnership program with the City of Columbus and that agency.

Why is water so expensive when you get it for free?

While rain water is free, water that is safe for human consumption and meets all state and federal standards must go through an extensive treatment process before it is sent to neighborhoods by a water distribution system which also has to be maintained. Columbus water rates are actually lower than many other communities.

Why am I still billed when I haven't used any water?

Each bill is comprised of water usage and service charges, and service charges are billed even if there is no consumption. The charges pay for meter reading, billing and other services that apply even when no

consumption occurs.

What is a Tenant Billing Agreement (TBA)?

An agreement signed by the owner of the property (or their representative) and the tenant, which allows the department to add the tenant's name on the account so they receive the bill; the owner also receives a copy.



I have a water leak at my home. Whose responsibility is it to fix and will it affect my bill?

The city maintains the water lines in the public right of way up to and including the curb box (usually near the sidewalk). Any leak from the curb box to the house is the property owner's responsibility. The bill is only affected if the leak is after the meter. Please report any leaks that appear to be city responsibility to 311 or 645-8276. If unsure of the location, a crew can come out and

help determine the source of the leak.

I am having issues with my landlord. What are my rights? Where can I call for help?

Contact the Columbus Urban League at 257-6300.

What is a CCF?

A measurement used in water consumption billing, it stands for one hundred cubic feet, which equals 748 gallons. An average adult uses about 8 - 10 CCF per quarter.

I don't believe my bill is correct. What steps can I take?

After reviewing the account with a Customer Service Representative and possibly a supervisor, a meter test can be requested. After that is reviewed, customers have the right to a hearing process by request.

On my property tax statement it says "sewer rental." What does that mean?

This means that a lien has been placed against the property's county taxes due to unpaid sewer charges. The charges were transferred off the customer account to the county records and will appear on next year's property taxes. This is allowable per city and state law because while water service can be shut off due to non-payment, sewer service cannot be disconnected.

Have more questions? Please call 311 or 645-8276.