

Frequently Asked Questions About Benicia's Water and Sewer Infrastructure and Conservation Efforts

Q: What is the issue?

A: As you know, California is in a severe drought. Benicia residents have been California leaders in water conservation, reducing water consumption by up to 43%. We must continue to upgrade our aging water infrastructure and implement current technologies that empower our local water consumers to conserve even more.

Q: How can the Benicia community continue to save water?

A: We have more work to do to further water conservation efforts, including repairing leaks and using modern, accurate reading meters.

The City is currently completing its audit of current leaks, deteriorating pipes, and aging infrastructure in our local water system. Addressing these issues are essential to maintaining our water conservation efforts, safe drinking water and our environment.

Q: Where does Benicia get its water?

A: Benicia gets nearly 85% percent of its water from the State Water Project – but unfortunately, there is no guarantee whatsoever that Benicia residents will continue to receive the water the State previously agreed to. This is an unacceptable situation for our City – we must be able to increase the reliability of our own local water supply and be self-sufficient.

Q: Is Benicia's water and sewer infrastructure safe?

A: All cities in Solano County have old, deteriorating water infrastructure that continues to jeopardize conservation efforts, the environment and public safety services. Significant segments of Benicia's water and sewer pipes are nearly 80 years old, and include outdated clay and asbestos cement pipes. We must also ensure a secure, adequate water supply in the event of an earthquake, fire or catastrophic emergency and mitigate leaks and sewage spills that can pollute the Carquinez Strait, Suisun Marsh, and San Francisco Bay. If a major earthquake struck, we could be in jeopardy of losing access to our main water source. Additionally, our plants have important monitoring equipment, pumps, and other major capital items that cannot be easily repaired, due to age of materials, and must be upgraded to ensure safety.

Q: What has the City done to address these issues?

A: While the City continues to practice fiscal prudence, to date, we are only in the position of focusing on the most critical water and sewer maintenance needs necessary for community health and safety. Our aging infrastructure still needs significant upgrades.

Also, as the State continues to change regulations required for cities' water and sewer systems, Benicia must also meet these requirements to avoid costly fines and to keep the community safe. In 2014, Benicia strengthened our Emergency Response Plan and increased the number of sewer lines being repaired and cleared of debris to prevent hazardous wastewater spills.

Q: Will water conservation efforts and infrastructure upgrades affect water and sewer rates?

A: Benicia is undergoing a citywide rate study to determine changes in water usage and consumer needs amid this historic drought and beyond. The City will continue to update the community about effects on rates so our community can continue being a statewide leader in water conservation efforts. As Federal and State Water Quality standards and requirements continue to evolve and become more stringent to conserve water and protect public health, Benicia, like other California cities, must meet these imposed standards. Ongoing preventive maintenance and capital needs cannot be further deferred or delayed.

Q: Didn't the City just recently raise water rates?

A: Yes. The City recently implemented a temporary drought surcharge when Benicia had to buy water on the open market after the State Water Project withheld 95% of Benicia's promised supply. This surcharge will be eliminated in the coming months.

Q: Where can I get more information about the City's water infrastructure and conservation efforts?

A: For more information visit www.ci.benicia.ca.us or call (707) 746-4240.