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waternews



Your source for all things water

Beyond the Big Freeze: A Message From SAWS' CEO

by Robert R. Puente



The extraordinary winter weather we experienced in February challenged our beloved city and our local utilities, and those across Texas, in ways never before seen.

Together, we rose above the obstacles of extended power and water outages, icy roads and pipes frozen solid.

When the agency that manages our state's electrical grid mandated rolling blackouts, it impacted SAWS operations as well. It takes a lot of power to pump water across the city, especially to areas in higher elevations. With pump stations offline, control systems and large pipes froze.

Compounding the issues, frozen water lines on private property began to break, causing low pressure across our system and handicapping our ability to deliver water.

Like many of our customers, SAWS team members worked under the same extended outage conditions from home, making connectivity an issue for our call center.

Despite these nearly insurmountable conditions, our team members rose to the challenge, and braved icy roads and negative wind chills to begin restoring service.

What SAWS Is Doing for Customers

The extreme winter weather event has caused unimaginable hardships, and the last thing our neighbors need to worry about is their next water bill. That's why we quickly decided to help ALL customers by billing them the lower of two amounts on their next bill: either the total water use charge for the current month, or the previous month's charge, whichever is lower.

This one-time adjustment will especially aid those who may have an unusually high bill due to a freeze-related leak. (As a reminder, SAWS already has discontinued water service shut-offs for non-payment since last spring as part of its coronavirus response effort.)



Our Promise to You

Moving forward, we will continue to work to improve the resiliency of your water system, including making sure our pump stations are better protected from rolling blackouts.

We'll continue to scrutinize and update our emergency plans for the future. We will raise the bar higher because it's what our customers expect from us, and it's what they deserve.

Join the MySAWS Conversation:



Home Efficiency Basics

Conserving resources, saving money and becoming more sustainable doesn't have to be hard work.

Improving the efficiency of your home is as simple as changing the way you maintain your home and appliances. From water to energy, irrigation to insulation, learn the basics of making your home as efficient as possible.

Join us for an online Home Efficiency Workshop presented by Eco Centro, April 5 or 22, 6-7:30 p.m.

Register at ecocentro.eventbrite.com.



Customer Service and 24-hour Emergency
210-704-SAWS (7297)
saws.org/waternews

SAWS Customers Receive Water Bill Relief

February's unprecedented winter weather wreaked havoc on all of us — not just by causing loss of power and water, but also leaving behind damage to homes and businesses.

To help those who may have higher bills due to freeze-related leaks or running faucets, SAWS is charging ALL customers based on water use for the current month, or last month's water use, whichever is lower.

This one-time adjustment applies to both residential and commercial SAWS accounts.

"These are very trying times for many, and we want to help ease the burden any way we can," said SAWS president/CEO Robert R. Puente.

SAWS will continue to work with customers on bill payment relief options moving forward. If you are unable to pay the full balance on your SAWS bill, you can set up a payment arrangement to keep your account in good standing and give you more time to pay. For details visit saws.org/arrangement.

Still struggling to pay, even with a payment arrangement? SAWS Uplift offers 14 different assistance programs with one simple application. Apply today at saws.org/uplift.

Big Freeze Aftermath: Sprinkler System Checkup

Below-freezing temperatures took a toll on pipes throughout the city. Your in-ground sprinkler system could also have sustained damage.

Take these steps now to avoid bigger, more costly problems later.

- Locate any leaking pipes or valves and mark them with a flag or paint.
- Find the backflow preventer, which is usually in a rectangular box in the ground near your water



meter. Shut it off by turning one or both of the levers 1/4 turn.

- Complete any necessary repairs.

A power outage can cause your controller to reset to factory settings. Program it to water once a week on your designated watering day, as determined by your street address.

Need help programming your controller? Visit gardenstylesa.com/controller.

Watch our how-to videos on finding and fixing leaks at saws.org/find-leaks.

Big Freeze Aftermath: Losses in the Landscape

Following February's extreme weather, many people are worried about their plants and if they'll survive.

Luckily most plants were still dormant when the record-setting freezes set in. So their roots, trunks, branches and buds should have been protected.

What to expect:

- Subtropical and small leafy plants likely froze back to the ground, but many will probably survive.
- Palms and cycads may be in critical condition; if the centers or "heart" of them did not freeze, they'll be OK.



- Leafy perennials such as spiderlilies, crinum and split leaf philodendron foliage may have turned to green mush. But don't worry — they'll likely survive.

- Citrus, depending on the species, will experience severe leaf loss. Unfortunately, Mexican lime and Improved Meyer lemon suffered the worst and will likely perish.

What can you do for affected plants? Wait a couple of weeks before starting any pruning to determine if they're still alive. Also, hold off on pruning shrubs and palm fronds until early April. The plants will tell you where to prune.