

## 2020 Hindsight: Sustaining the Common Need for Water in Uncommon Times

2020 was an extraordinary year for everyone, your neighbors at San Antonio Water System included. Even with a well-practiced emergency plan already in place, no one could have predicted exactly how a global pandemic would impact our city-owned water utility.

Yet even as hundreds of office-based employees shifted to working from home, the core mission of SAWS to provide Sustainable, Affordable Water Services to our community 24/7/365 never faltered. The workers who staff our field crews, water production facilities and sewage treatment plants continued as they always have — though with many new safety measures in place.

“As easy as it is to take for granted, people need access to clean water to be able to wash their hands and keep their homes and businesses safe,” said Steve Clouse, chief operating officer. “We’ve been very successful in meeting that need.”

In the midst of sustaining the “ordinary” work of keeping your water flowing, SAWS did celebrate a few extraordinary milestones in 2020 as well:

- Completion of the Vista Ridge pipeline, the largest non-Edwards Aquifer water supply in our city’s history.
- Beginning construction of San Antonio’s largest sewer project ever on the Southwest Side.

- Record progress in improving our sewer system citywide.
- Appointment of Jelynn LeBlanc Burley as the first woman to lead the SAWS Board of Trustees.

Also, in the face of financial hardships brought about by the pandemic, SAWS continues to reach out to our neighbors in need with 14 payment assistance programs. Apply online [saws.org/uplift](https://saws.org/uplift).

Need more time to pay? Set up an extended payment plan today at [saws.org/arrangement](https://saws.org/arrangement).

“As we continue to deal with the uncertainties of this pandemic, we have remained focused on providing our vital services to our community,” said Robert R. Puente, SAWS president/CEO. “I am proud of the continued excellence demonstrated by all SAWS employees during this challenging time.”



### SAWS Celebrates Seasoned Staffers



*Like most everything this year, the coronavirus crisis has completely altered how we go about our daily lives. But thanks to technology and teamwork, it didn't prevent the utility from honoring its truest and bluest family members. More than 100 seasoned staffers with 20, 25, 30, 35 and 40 years of service were honored Dec. 4, via videoconference, for their unwavering commitment. President and CEO Robert R. Puente thanked honorees for their years of dedication “making SAWS a national leader in everything we do.” Employees marking 40 years of service were (L to R) Bill Carter, Luis Moran, Rosalinda Bouchan, Santos Tovar and Francisco Herrera. (Not pictured: Norma Lugo.)*



**Help slow the spread — wear a mask when in public.**

**For the latest coronavirus guidance for San Antonio and Bexar County, visit [sanantonio.gov/covid19](https://sanantonio.gov/covid19). You can also text “COSAGOV” to 55000 or call 311.**

## Feeling stressed? Take a hike!

Enjoy a guided 1-mile out-and-back trail tour of Bulverde Oaks Nature Preserve.

Get a close look at the rescue bee hives, bird blind, stock pond, pollinator meadow and wildlife, and learn more about the importance of the nature preserve.

Group size is limited — register now for an upcoming Saturday tour at [greensatx.org/events](https://greensatx.org/events).



**Customer Service and 24-hour Emergency**  
**210-704-SAWS (7297)**  
[saws.org/waternews](https://saws.org/waternews)

## Last Chance To Prune Oaks

If you plan to prune your oak trees this winter, there's not much time left if you want to minimize the chance of oak wilt. During the coldest days of the year, the beetles that carry the spores of the oak wilt fungus are very few and unlikely to fly.

Pruning is done for three reasons (in order of importance): safety, tree health and appearance. Although appearance is often mentioned as a reason for pruning, it's really the least significant. (After all, trees don't get pruned in the forest.)

Some helpful dos and don'ts when pruning oaks:

- Prune narrow branch junctions that are



V-shaped; these are structurally weak.

- Shorten or remove long branches that have been repeatedly stripped of their lateral branches.
- Cut the “3-D” branches — dead, diseased and dying. These are a source of sickness and insects.
- Never cut through the branch collar. This donut-shaped ring at the junction of two branches or trunks has specialized cells that reduce decay and disease.
- Finally, always paint fresh oak wounds — this is essential to preventing oak wilt.

Visit [GardenStyleSA.com](https://GardenStyleSA.com) for landscaping tips and weekly watering amounts to keep your yard looking great using less water.

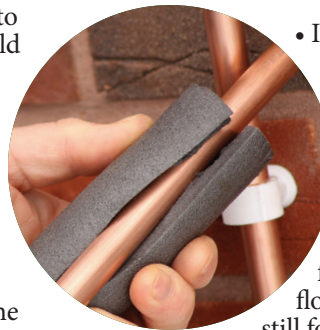
## Protect Your Pipes

South Texas winters typically aren't severe, but it's always a good idea to be aware of the dangers of water pipes freezing or bursting in cold temperatures.

In very cold weather, ice begins to form in plumbing exposed to cold air. This can cause a blockage and excessive water pressure, ultimately causing the pipe to burst. Temperatures in San Antonio rarely drop low enough to cause plumbing to freeze or burst, so many people don't know how to prevent it.

Follow these tips to help avoid the cost and inconvenience of frozen pipes:

- Seal openings where cold air can reach unprotected water pipes, like outside



faucets. Cold winds can speed up the freezing process.

- Cover exposed pipes with foam or fiberglass insulation sleeves, the thicker the better.
- In cases when there's no internal heat, or if there are extended freezing temperatures, leave cabinet doors open under the kitchen and bathroom sinks to allow warmer room air to circulate around pipes.

While not ideal, you can let faucets drip slowly to keep water flowing through the pipes. Ice might still form, but an open faucet allows water to escape. Just remember to turn off the faucet when the freeze warning passes to avoid sticker shock on your next water bill.

## Recycle Your Christmas Tree

After the holidays, recycle your Christmas tree into nutrient-rich mulch for free.

These City of San Antonio recycling locations will accept Christmas trees for free throughout the month of January:

- Bitters Brush Recycling Center, 1800 E. Bitters Rd.
- Nelson Gardens Brush Recycling Center, 8963 Nelson Rd.

You can also compost a real Christmas tree by placing it in your green city organics bin, as long as it completely fits in the cart with the lid closed. Be sure to remove all lights, decorations and stands.

For more information, visit [sanantonio.gov/swmd](https://sanantonio.gov/swmd) or call 311.

