



UTILITY TALK

September/October 2024

Providing safe and reliable water and gas services.

Serving Richmond, Henrico and North Chesterfield

Century of Commitment to Clean Water

Since the beginning of time water has been essential to life. After permission was granted by the Virginia General Assembly, in 1829 iron pipes were constructed for the purpose of conducting water in the City of Richmond from the Canal Turning Basin down to what are now Cary and Main Streets. This was the first time the City was authorized to construct a distribution system beyond digging wells and providing pumps in various parts of the city. As the years progressed the growing population and demand for accessible water caused water delivery to transition from wells and pumps to a more sophisticated distribution and treatment system.

The City of Richmond's Water Treatment Plant was established in 1924. Since being put into service, the Water Treatment Plant has outlasted many challenging times, including the Great Depression, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.

As severe economic hardships hit the nation from 1929 – 1941 during the Great Depression, DPU battled with a declining customer base as the number of single-family households dwindled. This, in turn, caused a limited availability of supplies needed for system repairs and upgrades. Despite these challenges, the department was able to come up with creative solutions to complete the necessary improvements. In 1931, a new facility was constructed to store and handle chlorine at the filtration plant, ensuring continued safety of the water supply. Additionally, innovative solutions were implemented such as installing a new wheel to draw water from the C&O Canal during droughts, addressing the strain caused by low water flow and pollution from upstream industrial plants. The department's ingenuity shone through during this difficult period.

Throughout the years more challenges came about while facing natural disasters such as Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Even while battling floods, heavy rains and widespread damage the Water Treatment Plant continued operations, supplying the Richmond region with water in a time they needed it the most, demonstrating DPU's preparedness and commitment to ensuring the city's water supply wouldn't be compromised.

More recently, in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges for communities across the globe, and Richmond was no exception. Amidst the uncertainty, DPU remained focused on protecting the health and safety of residents by continuing to provide clean and safe drinking water. During the pandemic, the department followed a utility disconnection moratorium to ensure no one lost access to vital water services. Additionally, DPU promoted and facilitated applications for CARES utility relief funding to customers facing financial hardships due to the pandemic, helping to ease their burden and ensure continuous service.

As the Water Treatment Plant commemorates its 100th anniversary, DPU's mission remains unchanged: to provide safe, clean and reliable utility service while creating exceptional value. Over the decades, DPU has adapted to whatever cultural and economic shifts came our way, demonstrating flexibility and innovation. The legacy of Richmond's Water Treatment Plant is one of resilience and dedication. No matter the challenges, DPU continues to ensure that every resident can rely on the vital water resource, one drop at a time.



Richmond's Water Treatment Plant in 1924



Richmond's Water Treatment Plant in 2024



Richmond's Water Treatment Plant during Hurricane Agnes in 1972

DID YOU KNOW?

Natural gas is odorless and colorless in its natural state. Mercaptan is a chemical that is often added to natural gas to make it easier to detect leaks. Mercaptan is a colorless gas with a strong, unpleasant odor that some say smells like rotten eggs, skunk or sulfur. If you suspect you may have a natural gas leak, always leave the area first then call 911.

Join Us for the 2024 Fall Citizens Academy!

Do you ever wonder about what it takes to keep your City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities services running smoothly? This October, DPU will host a fall session of Citizens Academy, an opportunity that provides curious minds a behind-the-scenes experience and have all their questions answered.

What is the Citizens Academy?

Over four two-hour sessions, you'll explore the operations that ensure DPU's water and gas systems are safe and reliable. However, this is more than just a classroom experience – it's a chance to see and understand the complex processes that make everyday life possible.

Why Should You Join?

Gain Insider Knowledge: Meet the people behind the scenes. Learn directly from industry professionals. Understand the science and technology behind water purification, gas distribution and more.

Interactive Demonstrations: Get hands-on with the technology and tools used by our dedicated teams.

Exclusive Tours: Ever wonder what a water treatment plant looks like up close? Or where the stormwater goes after a heavy rain event? Wonder no more. Our tour guides will lead you through our facilities giving you a unique perspective on the essential work done at DPU.



Spaces are limited, so we encourage you to apply today. Visit www.rva.gov/public-utilities/news to learn more.

Rake Your Leaves – For the Greater Good of Our Waterways


With the fall season approaching soon the changing leaves will fall to cover our lawns, streets and sidewalks, turning a once beautiful sight into what many consider a chore – raking leaves. Still, the proper disposal of leaves is very necessary. It's essential to understand that raking leaves is about more than just keeping our yards tidy; it's about protecting our waterways and contributing to the health of our environment.

Did you know when leaves are left to decompose on greenery the leaves can naturally replenish soil with valuable nutrients and organic matter? However, in urban and residential areas, leaves often fall or rains wash them onto streets and sidewalks. Here, they can travel into storm drains and end up in our river. Even if you do not live near a waterway, eventually leaves on your street will wash into storm drains and then travel to and impact nearby waterways. The potential impact might not seem like a big deal at first glance, but it can have serious consequences.

Leaves can cause significant problems for storm drainage systems by contributing to residential flooding and harmful impacts on waterways. During rainfall, stormwater can carry leaves into storm drains, blocking them and causing water to back up onto streets, which requires community effort to prevent. Additionally, as rainwater passes through leaf piles, it extracts phosphorus, creating a mixture that pollutes local waterways, promoting algae blooms that reduce oxygen levels and harm aquatic life. The decomposition of these algae can create dead zones in rivers, further disrupting ecosystems and making the water less safe for public use. To avoid these issues, the City of Richmond Department of Public Works offers convenient services to help residents dispose of leaves properly. For more information, check out the Leaf Collection insert included in your bill this month.

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