

Questions and Answers About Your Drinking Water

- 1) Where does my drinking water come from?** The answer to this depends on whether you have a private well or get your water from a public water system. If you have a private well, the depth you get your water from can vary from 50 to over 500 feet. If you are getting water from a shallow aquifer (water supply near the surface of the earth) you are in the 100 to 250 foot range. If you are in the Floridian Aquifer (the same place Auburn Water System gets its water) you will be over 500 feet in depth. The danger with a shallow well is that water and contaminants from the surface can filter through the soil and become suspended in the shallow water level. Most people on a private well do not have their water routinely tested for bacteria and chemicals, but it is a very wise thing to do to protect your family. Public water systems in Florida get their water from different sources, depending on where they are located in the state. Some get their water from surface waters, such as Lake Okeechobee in Central Florida. This water goes through several stages of treatment before it can be delivered to customers. Some water systems get their water from desalination plants, such as Tampa) which make potable water out of sea water. In our area, several water systems to the west of our county get their water from the sand and gravel aquifer, which is shallower than the Floridian Aquifer.
- 2) I am on public water. What types of tests are taken to assure my water is safe?** Public water systems perform a series of tests at varying schedules. Monthly bacteriological tests of the raw water from each well and the chlorinated water throughout the distribution system are taken on a monthly basis and tested through a Florida Certified Laboratory. The number of samples required to be tested varies with population. Public water systems test for heavy metals, pesticides, organic compounds, radioactivity and inorganic compounds on a routine basis. Results are provided to our customers yearly in our Consumer Confidence Report, which is mailed to every customer and is available online.
- 3) How many public water systems are there in Okaloosa County?** There are eleven (11) public water systems in Okaloosa County, each being assigned a set service area boundary, which was determined by a Federal Court. A copy of the boundaries of the water systems is available on the Okaloosa County GIS Website <http://webgis.co.okaloosa.fl.us/gis/maps/wsa.pdf>
- 4) I am interested in coming onto Auburn Water System. Why are the charges “Capital Improvement” and “Capacity Replacement” included in the tap on fees (fees required to obtain a water connection to a water utility)?** Over the years the water lines, connections, service lines, and other components of a water distribution system need repair. When a potable water well motor or pump goes out, it must be replaced. Maintenance on the potable water wells, storage tanks, water lines that carry the water to the service line that connect to the water meter at your business or residence, and other equipment costs, all figure into the capital improvement. The capital improvement money is deposited in a special account to assure Auburn Water System has the funds available immediately when repairs or maintenance are necessary. All water systems are required to have extra storage capacity and pumping capacity in the event one well has to be shut down or a tank has to be taken off line. As our customer base increases, so does the requirement for increased storage of water (additional tanks) and increased capacity to pump water from the water source (new wells). A new well cost approximately \$600,000. A water storage tank runs around 1.5 million dollars. The Board of Directors believes the increased cost to provide these services should be paid for by new customers.
- 5) My bill is higher than it has been? I don’t think the meter is right.** We run a monthly exception report where our computer system flags unusually high bills. When a high reading is flagged, we routinely make an additional visit for a visual check of the meter to assure the reading is correct. Our meters are read

initially using a touch read wand (where we tap the top of the meter box signal port and the reading is transferred to the handheld computer) or a radio read, where we drive by the meter and our computer in the vehicle picks up the signal of the water reading. If we do not find anything wrong with the reading, the customer can request the meter be tested. However, if the meter comes back good, the customer will be charged \$50 for the cost of the test. If the meter shows a problem, the bill will be adjusted and Auburn Water pays the cost of the test. It is VERY rare that a meter will read more than the amount of water that has actually flowed through it. In fact, as most meters age they actually begin to record less water than what actually flows through them. With an accurately reading meter we cannot determine why your bill was high. It may have been because of a leak, a commode running, a hose left on, or some other reason. We suggest that you go to your meter at approximately the same time each day for a week and record the water usage. Please see "How can I check for a leak-item 7 below) for ways to check for leaks. That will often spot a leak or give you an indication of why your readings may have been high. It is important to remember that our billing is a month behind. For example: water used in December will not show up until your February bill.

- 6) How can I check for a leak?** Be sure that all faucets, showers, or appliances that use water are turned off inside and outside your house. If when you check the dial on your meter you find either the red leak indicator on the bottom right side of the brass meters is spinning, or the digits are increasing on the new plastic meters, you have a leak. To help isolate the location, turn the water off at the shutoff valve next to your house and leave the water turned on at the meter. If the digital readout on the new plastic meters, or the red triangular leak indicator on the brass meters continues to spin, the leak is in the line coming from the meter to your house. If the leak is inside your house, check the commodes first. Another way to check for leaks is to turn the water off at your meter. Leave it off for five minutes and turn it back on. If the leak indicator or digital readout moves there is a leak and the water is filling the pipes back up. Finding a leak in a water supply line to a structure is often difficult and time consuming. Many times the leak is not noticeable as the ground is absorbing the water. In this case, the best way to correct the problem may be to replace the water supply line with at least a schedule 40 pipe. The water level in the toilet tank should be one inch below the overflow valve. If you hear the water in the tank coming in-shutting off and coming in again repeatedly, either the rubber flapper is not sealing or the ballcock (bubble shaped float) is not functioning properly. Other places a leak can occur is under a foundation, in the walls, or at outside faucets. Even washerless faucets can leak and must have their seals replaced eventually.
- 7) How do I know if the leak is an Auburn Water System leak or mine?** The leak is Auburn's responsibility if the leak is between the meter and the road. In the meter box, the meter, and any brass component inside the box are Auburn's responsibility. The customer's responsibility begins at the connection adapter to the brass ball valve (a pvc fitting most of the time) in the meter box and includes the water line to the customer's house from the meter.
- 8) I have a leak. How can I turn the water off to make the repair?** There is a brass shutoff valve inside the meter box. It will have a colored (usually yellow) handle. Turn the handle 1/4 turn to shut off the water. Also, many houses have a shutoff valve near their house that can be used if the leak is inside the house. To turn the water back on just turn the handle where it is in line with the water pipe.
- 9) I want to make the repair to my water line myself. Can I just start digging or do I have to call someone first?** Before you do any digging, call 811 for line spots. If you dig without first calling for utilities to mark their lines, and you break their line, you will be financially responsible for the repair.
- 10) I don't like the location of my meter. What can I do to get it moved?** If the request is for convenience, there will be a charge based on labor and materials to move the meter. If the move is necessary due to a

hazardous situation or for Auburn Water's convenience, there will be no charge. If you have any doubts about whether or not a charge would be applied to move the meter, please call us.

- 11) What types of appliances/fixtures can I get to help reduce water use?** New commodes have either single flush capacity of 1.2 gallons, or dual flush, which uses 0.6 gallons for liquids, or 1.2 gallons for solids. An example of a device that can be used on older toilets to save water is the BlueSource HYR270 HydroRight Drop-in Dual Flush Converter by MJSI. It costs less than \$20 and will save over 70% of the water from an older commode. There are other water saving devices out there-this is just one example of one that had good reviews. When the decision is made to replace existing fixtures, be sure to look for those that are water conserving. Front loader washing machines (energy star rated) can use up to 70% less water than top loaders. Gas dryers cost more initially, but cost less to operate. Gas hot water heaters are cheaper to operate than electric ones. Gas on-demand hot water heaters come on only when hot water is needed-they have no storage tank, thus use no energy to keep water hot.



- 12) Can I activate garbage service at Auburn Water System?** We do not handle garbage service, but you can call Waste Pro at 869-8600 if you are in the City of Crestview. If you are in the County, garbage service is provided either by Waste Management at 682-3891, or The Trash Can Company at 682-5051. Waste Management provides large green containers for garbage. The Trash Can Company requires you to provide your own waste receptacle.
- 13) What is an average water bill?** There really is not an average. Many of our customers use less than 3000 gallons per month; others use many times that amount. The Florida Septic tank Code estimates water use at 100 gallons per day per bedroom, or 9000 gallons per month for a three bedroom of 2250 or less square feet.
- 14) Where can I get a copy of Auburn Water System rates?** You can get a copy of our rates from our website at www.auburnwatersystem.com or from our office.
- 15) Do you take credit or debit cards?** We do accept both credit and debit cards, but there is a \$3.00 processing fee. We take Visa, Discover and MasterCard only.
- 16) Can I pay my bill online?** If you will go to www.auburnwatersystem.com you can pay your bill directly. You can also pay online through your bank using BillPay.
- 17) I want to water my grass? How much water does a sprinkler system use?** An in-ground sprinkler system can use varying amounts of water, depending on how long the sprinklers are left on and what the gallons per minute capability of the sprinkler head is. Watering a garden or lawn can use very large amounts of water quickly. As much as 80 percent of the water used around the home during summer is used outside. Watering the lawn is the main outside water use. 624 gallons (83.3 cubic feet) of water are required to apply 1 inch of water on 1,000 square feet of lawn.

- 18) What size meter do I need if I use a sprinkler system?** At least a one-inch meter is needed for a sprinkler system to work properly. Check with your sprinkler installer to assure you get the correct size meter. A double check backflow valve is required for a in-ground sprinkler system when public water is used, however if the in-ground sprinkler system is set to also disperse chemicals as it water the lawn, a reduced pressure zone (RPZ) backflow is required. A portable sprinkler connected to an outside faucet with a garden hose does not require a backflow prevention device for Auburn Water; however, it is recommended that all outside faucets have a backflow installed on outside faucets to prevent back siphonage into your home.
- 19) Why do I need a backflow preventer if I have a well or pump form a lake to supply water to my sprinkler system?** Auburn Water System is regulated by rules developed by the Department of Environmental Protection in Washington D.C. and the Department of Environmental Protection for the State of Florida. These agencies have developed rules that we must follow, including recommendations from the American Water Works Association, which states that a Reduced Pressure Zone(RPZ) backflow is required whether or not the private well or pump from a surface water of body is connected to the public water. The reason for this rule is that in the past customers have made cross connections with water that is untested, which could have contaminated our entire water system. Public water supplies are tightly regulated to assure our customers receive high quality safe water for their use. We cannot risk the possibility of having that water contaminated, so the backflow device is required when a private well is present, or if water is pumped from a surface body of water for a sprinkler system.
- 20) What if I see something suspicious around one of Auburn Water System's wells-what should I do?** Please call 911 and report your concerns. They will notify law enforcement and Auburn Water to investigate.
- 21) I had my water cut off for non-payment and now my water meter is locked. What happens if I break the lock?** Auburn Water System takes this very seriously. If the lock is broken at the water meter, a \$1000 fine is assessed.
- 22) What happens if I bypass the water meter and connect directly from the service line to my house?** If this occurs you will be charged with theft of service, which carries the penalty of a fine and jail time through the court system, plus you will be fined by Auburn Water System \$1000. An illegal connection can contaminate water for our customers and this is taken VERY SERIOUSLY!!
- 23) What steps has Auburn Water System taken to assure our water will be available after a disaster, such as a hurricane?** Auburn Water System has the ability to store over 2 1/2 million gallons of water in our tanks. We also have in-place portable generators to assure we can continue to pump water if the power is out. Our new building has a concrete reinforced safe room where our emergency response personnel will stay during a disaster. It is completely self-contained and provides safety for emergency response team to assure they will be able to check the wells and have them operational as soon as it is safe to travel after the storm.
- 24) If it is after hours or on the weekend how can I make contact with Auburn Water?** Call our regular number, 682-3413, and when the automated attendant comes on, press number 5. That will take you to our afterhours emergency response answering service.

- 25) When are late fees applied to my bill?** Any payment received after the 15th of each month incurs a 10% late fee. For those who drop their bills in our drop box on the evening of the 15th, you will not be charged the late fee. We open those bills the first thing each morning and apply to our customer's accounts.
- 26) What if my bill is postmarked on the 15th-but Auburn Water does not receive it until a day or two later?** If we receive the payment in the mail after the 15th, a late fee will be applied regardless of the postmark.
- 27) If Auburn Water has a leak in a main line, will I be charged more on my bill?** Customers are never charged for any water that does not go through their meter.
- 28) What should I do if I have a water quality concern, such as brown or cloudy water, or water that smells?** Please call our office at 682-3413 if you have any concerns about water quality. Brown water can be the result of opening a fire hydrant too fast, causing rust in the iron pipes and hydrant housing to come loose and color the water. Cloudy water can be caused from air in the lines, which sometimes happens after a line break. If you are at the end of a water line, sometimes water can have an unusual odor due to a chlorine buildup, Auburn Water can correct by flushing the lines with a flushing hydrant.
- 29) Why does Auburn Water System issue boil water notices?** Occasionally a water main will develop a leak or a break and the only way we can fix it is to isolate the line by shutting off valves on each side of the break/leak. This will cause the line to drain down so it can be repaired. If water pressure drops to a certain point, or if water has to be shut off for more than 1 service connection, a boil water notice is issued. During the boil water notice, customers should not use the water for drinking, cooking or bathing unless they boil the water to a rolling boil for 5 minutes, or add 10 drops of unscented bleach to a gallon of water. Let the water stand with the top of the container left off for 15 minutes. A boil water rescission is not issued until we have two bacteriological samples of the water (after the repair is made) have come back good. Boil water notices are left as door hangers for all affected customers. A rescission notice is also left as a door hanger to let our customers know the water is safe to drink again.
- 30) Does Auburn Water System have to notify me if my water is about to be cut off for non-payment?** No water utility is required by law to notify a customer when their water is about to be cut off for non-payment. As a courtesy to our customers, we have a phone notification system to let the customer know cutoff is near. The message will advise the customer of the last date to have the bill paid before cutoff occurs. We cannot however provide these courtesy calls to you if your contact phone number is not up to date in our computer system.
- 31) Does Auburn Water System have to notify me if they suspect a leak at my home or business?** The responsibility for a leak rests with the customer and there is no requirement for a water utility to notify a customer of a suspected leak. As a courtesy to our customers, we do check a customer's meter when our system flags an unusually high reading for water use. If we find the meter spinning, which would indicate a leak, we will attempt to make contact with the customer at their residence. If no one is home, we will leave a door hanger. We will NOT turn your water off unless there is an obvious leak, such as a broken waterline spraying water.
- 32) How often is my water meter read and when will I receive a bill?** Your meter is read monthly. You should receive your bill by the 3rd day of the month. You can always call our office if for some reason your bill does not arrive. If you do not receive a bill, be sure to call our office in plenty of time before the 15th of the month to assure you can get your payment in and avoid a late fee.

- 33) Do water rates increase if I use more water?** Most water utilities use a block rate schedule, whereby rates increase per thousand gallons the more water a customer uses. This is something the Water Management Districts want the water utility to have in place to encourage conservation.
- 34) If I use no water will I still have a monthly bill?** Yes—the monthly base bill is based on a usage of between 0-3000 gallons. The bill is the same if you use no water, or you use up to 3,000 gallons. This is in place as the water system must assure the water lines, potable water wells, storage tanks and water lines are able to provide the service to the customer even when no water is used.
- 35) When I purchase a water meter, does it belong to me and can I move it when I want to?** The meter does NOT belong to the customer—it remains the property of the water system. If it were not this way, whenever a meter was damaged or required replacement, the customer would be responsible for the costs. The meter stays with the property should the customer move.
- 36) Do I have to notify you if I move?** Yes—you need to contact Auburn Water System within three days after you move so we can put a lock on the meter. If you do not do this, and someone else moves in, you will be responsible for the bill.
- 37) How long after my final bill is settled will I receive a refund?** Depending on when an account is terminated, it may be up to a month before the refund is processed. Auburn Water System processes deposit refund checks once per month. Those leaving the system early in the month may get their refund checks before than those who terminate near the end of the month as the date they terminate may be after we have processed refunds for that month.
- 38) What do I do if I cannot make my monthly payment?** Call our office at 682-3413 and ask to speak with Julie, Beth or Cassie to set up a payment plan.
- 39) Can I hook up two houses or two businesses on one meter?** No—each structure must have its own water meter.
- 40) Are businesses required to have a backflow preventer?** Yes. Contact our office at 682-3413 and ask for either the cross connection control coordinator or office manager.
- 41) If my water is turned off for non-payment, can I pay online? Can I pay with a check or credit card?** A customer can pay online, but it may take up to 72 hours to post to your account due to the time it takes for the credit card company to process the payment. It is much better to come in to pay with cash or credit card, or call in to pay with credit card. We do NOT accept checks for reconnection payment.
- 42) Why don't I have a fire hydrant close by?** When Auburn Water System was formed, the loans it received to begin operations and lay pipe were for lines sufficient to provide potable water. Fire hydrants were not something the loans could be made for. Many of our lines are simply too small to allow a fire hydrant to be placed on them (at least a 6-inch line is required). As we upgrade the lines, we will be providing fire hydrants. In the meantime, if a customer or group of customers wish a fire hydrant and the water supply line is adequate to support a hydrant, we will install it for just the cost of the materials—we do NOT charge labor to install the hydrant.
- 43) Do you put chemicals in the water?** The only chemical we put in our water is chlorine, which is required by law.

- 44) What happens if I leave owing a bill to Auburn Water System?** Auburn Water System will file with the collection agency for bills that are not paid in full when a customer terminates.
- 45) I have seen people dump used motor oil in the yard? How does this affect the water supply?** One gallon of oil can contaminate one million gallons of water. Waste oil and other hazardous materials must be disposed of properly. Waste oil can be disposed of at no cost at most automotive parts businesses and at the Okaloosa County Road Department. For hazardous materials disposal, visit this website: http://www.co.okaloosa.fl.us/dept_pw_resources_recycle_haz.html or call 651-7394.
- 46) How should I dispose of expired drugs?** First let's talk about what not to do. Do NOT flush expired drugs down the commode. Septic tanks and sewer system are not designed to handle the drugs and we certainly don't want them winding up in the water supply. Mix expired medicines (do NOT crush tablets or capsules) with a substance such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds and place it in a rigid plastic container-taped with strong tape and put out with the trash for disposal. Another alternative is to contact your local pharmacy. Some pharmacies will take back expired medicine at any time, and others will hold periodic drives to collect it. Either way, the pharmacy might be able to take back your expired medication and dispose of it properly.
- 47) Where can I go to get tips on water conservation?** Look on our website: www.auburnwatersystem.com for water conservation tips; bank draft application; Landlord form for new water; instructions for new tap placement for customers; indoor water auditbooklet; trouble checklist; additional information on leaks; temporary water service form; current rates; deposit (location) transfer form; deposit (name) transfer form and other useful forms.
- 48) I hear water running outside--what should I do?** If it is during the day, go outside to see if you can find the leak or line break. Turn the water off at the meter if you find a leak or line break until you can have it repaired. If at night, do not go outside by yourself. Turn on lights outside and have at least two people go out to find the leak if possible. This is for safety, as someone may have turned on the water intentionally and attack when a single person goes out at night to investigate.
- 49) My spouse was the only one on the water account and they have died.** What do I need to do? The account can be updated with the surviving spouse's name and information. There is no service charge in this case. A copy of the death certificate must be presented for review for the change to take place.
- 50) The account holder passes away and there is no surviving spouse. A relative or other occupant wishes to move into the home. How is this handled?** A copy of the death certificate must be provided for review by our office. The account of the deceased account holder will be terminated with any remaining deposit sent to their estate. The relative or other occupant must open a new account with the proper deposit.