

Operational Services Briefing to

Regular Meeting of Council

2025 July 29

ISC: UNRESTRICTED

C2025-0734

Water Outage Communications

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

The purpose of this briefing is to provide an update to Council on the status of improvements for customer service standards for essential water service disruptions (water outages). This is in response to a Notice of Motion, (Report Number: EC2025-0427) that was brought forward on April 15, 2025.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The City operates and maintains over \$28.7 billion in water infrastructure, including two water treatment plants and more than 5,000 km of underground pipes, to deliver drinking water to customers across Calgary and the region.

Our customer commitments are to ensure that Calgarians have:

- Reliable and available access to drinking water;
- A secure water supply now and for future generations; and
- High-quality water that is safe to drink.

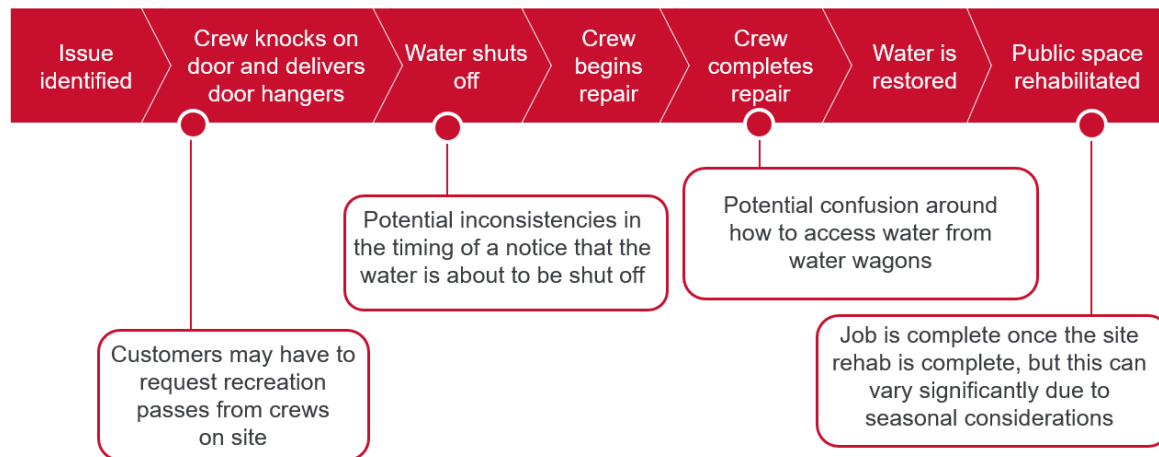
While 98% of customers do not experience a service disruption in a typical year, those who do face significant inconvenience. These disruptions, often caused by water main breaks, can affect daily routines, business operations, and access to essential services. That's why timely communication and support are critical.

Currently, when a disruption occurs, our process includes:

- Notifying affected customers through door-to-door visits and printed door hangers;
- Providing information about the disruption to 311 and on the Water Outage website;
- Delivering water wagons to provide temporary access to drinking water; and
- Updating the Water Outage website through stages of the repair process.

The Water Outage website receives an average of 23,000 visits per month, making it a key source of information for our customers during outages. It is where most customers go to stay informed about service disruptions.

Current Process – How Customers Experience a Water Outage:











What We Heard – Learnings and Observations:

Through public engagement, Innovation Lab focus groups, monitoring of current work processes and City crew feedback, we noted the following:

- A 48-hour timeframe to restore service is generally acceptable to customers;
- Estimated service restoration times are valued;
- Proactive updates via text or email are preferred;
- Recreation passes to access showers are appreciated when provided;
- Water wagons can be confusing to use;
- Door hanger messages are often forgotten or missed; and
- Website is visited often but lacks timely updates.

How We Communicate and Support Compared to Other Cities and Utilities:

As part of the improvement project, the Innovation Lab conducted a jurisdictional scan with Water Services of both regional, North American, and European utilities. What we found is that Calgary is already ahead in several key areas. For example, while most municipalities rely on door hangers and websites, some but not all offer recreation passes during outages. Calgary also stands out for deploying water wagons and exploring temporary water hookups for critical customers and businesses.

Legend: ✓ Basic Service ✓+ Enhanced Service	Calgary	Okanagan	Kingston (Utilities Kingston)	Edmonton (EPCOR)	Scotland (Scottish Water)
Outage Map			✓	✓+	✓+
Job Status Updates	✓	✓+	✓	✓	✓+
Alternative Water Provided	✓			✓	✓
Rec Passes	✓				
Methods of Communication					
Opt-in Text Notification Service					

In terms of communication, about half of the surveyed utilities offer text or email notifications, and only a few provide estimated return-to-service times—typically for planned outages only. We're working toward offering both features for all outages.

We also learned that while many utilities support critical infrastructure and customers like hospitals, very few provide additional support for vulnerable residential customers. Calgary is exploring ways to fill that gap through initiatives like 'Hydration Heroes' (neighbors helping neighbors like the Snow Angel program) and expanded rec pass access.

Overall, this comparison confirms that we're not only aligned with industry trends—we're leading in several areas. But it also highlights where we can go further to improve consistency, expand accessibility, and strengthen customer trust.

Customer enhancements and planned improvements completed or nearing completion in 2025 include:

- A redesigned website with improved usability, accessibility, and more timely updates.
- Expanded access to recreation passes for showering for all residents impacted by an outage, for up to 7-days, delivered via door hangers.
- Updated signage and clearer instructions on water wagons to improve ease of use.
- Enhanced door hangers that provide clearer communication and where to find additional information.
- Launching mapping tools to visualize outage areas.

Enhancements planned for 2026 and beyond focus on further improving the customer experience through:

- Providing estimated return-to-service times for all outages.
- Introducing opt-in text and email notifications to deliver timely, repair-specific updates.
- Enhancing public space rehabilitation to ensure timely restoration of sidewalks, roads, and landscaping after repairs.

Enhancements to expect to the water outage communications process:



Reporting on Return to Service

Currently, the average time to restore regular water service after a water main break is targeted at 48 hours. As of Q1, 2025 the return to service was above average due to challenging repairs, although month of June was 45 hours and we are trending in this favourable direction this quarter. The reporting frequency for these metrics is included in mid-year and annual reporting and results can be found on [Calgary.ca](https://calgary.ca). In the future, beyond 2026, we are exploring the creation of a public dashboard to share response times on an on-demand basis.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

- Improving communications builds trusting and positive relationships with our customers. Improving accessibility to alternative sources during outages shows our commitment to providing reliable and available potable water.

Environmental

- Water outages are typically because of a break, or a repair needed on our infrastructure. By responding quickly and setting timely estimated-return-to-service targets we are improving the reliability and sustainability of our water system and minimizing overall water losses.

Economic

- Water service outages can cause economic impacts to all customers. By improving our accessibility to alternative sources (water wagons, temporary hook-ups, the use of City Recreational wash facilities etc.) and keeping customers updated on our progress we can help lessen this impact.

The improvements implemented to date and the proposed enhancements will allow us to support our Triple Bottom Line Policy and help The City fulfill our vision and purpose of “making life better every day”.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. None

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General Manager Doug Morgan concurs with the information in this Briefing.