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President's Message – We are a Public Water System

Charles Eley, April 1, 2026

California defines a public water system as one that has 15 or more service connections. We have 37. Being a public water system means that we are regulated by the State Water Boards and this triggers all sorts of requirements. The cost of complying with these requirements is part of the cost of doing business. Most of the requirements for our little water company are fundamentally the same as those for Sebastopol with 3,000 service connections or Santa Rosa with 53,000 service connections.

Here are just some of the requirements?

- We must hire a *treatment operator* certified by the State to manage our wells and treatment plant. This is Tyler Judson at Weeks Drilling in Sebastopol.
- We must hire a *distribution operator*, also certified by the State, to manage our storage tanks, distribution lines and meters. This is Reuel Miller.
- We must periodically take samples of our water at five different locations and send the samples to a certified testing laboratory to test for contaminants or pollutants. Alpha Analytics does these tests for us.
- A backflow preventor must be installed at each service connection that has rainwater collection or other alternative water sources, which is more than half of us. Furthermore, these devices have to be inspected each year by a professional to make sure they are working properly.
- Recently, we had to make a visual inspection of all our 36 service connections to document that there are no lead pipes. There aren't.

In addition to the above, we must produce a lot of paperwork. We generate a consumer confidence report each year, which is published on our website. Every month we must file a SAFER report, which documents our system's operation for the month and calls attention to any problems. We must also maintain an emergency notification plan, a water shortage contingency plan, a drought report when we have to haul water, and various other plans and documents.

The purpose of these requirements is to assure that our water supply is dependable and safe but they come at a cost. Most are fixed costs that are more or less the same for a company with 3,000 service connections like Sebastopol or just 37 connections like us.[1] Having to divide these costs among just a few members is a primary reason our water bills are as high as they are. We are clearly at the wrong end of the *economies-of-scale* curve. Our small volunteer Board is doing all it can to save costs, but our options are limited.

[1] Shortly after incorporation, in 1982, the Sonoma County Public Health Service placed a moratorium on new service connections because of inadequate water supply. The moratorium is still in effect. It is now being enforced by the California Water Boards.