

CURRENTS

Responding to Your Top Water Quality Questions

▶ Colorless, odorless, tasteless. These are all words we might think of when we think of water, especially our drinking water. But the chemistry and science of water and water quality are a bit more complicated.

The water that eventually reaches your tap goes through thousands of rigorous tests per month to ensure it meets or exceeds all regulatory requirements. We also maintain thousands of miles of water and sewer lines throughout Pittsburgh. This pipeline makes up the public water system you use and rely on.

Most questions we receive pertaining to odor and color are often related to plumbing inside a building or home. For the benefit of our customers, our Water Quality team is happy to answer some of the most commonly asked questions.

Why does my water have a rotten egg odor? The distinct odor of rotten eggs is often the byproduct of sulfur-eating bacteria hanging out in your hot water tank. To use a comparison, a hot water tank is like an incubator. If the conditions are just right – say, you haven’t used hot water in a while or were on vacation –

bacteria can grow. If the odor is more like wet dog, the issue is likely the same, but a different type of bacteria is the culprit.

Try running only cold water on the faucet in question. If the odor subsides when cold water is running, it could indicate the source of the smell is in fact your hot water tank. In this case, check your hot water tank.

Why do I smell sewage when I turn on my tap? This odor is usually because there’s a clogged or slow drain somewhere in your home plumbing. That drain will pick up debris, which expels odors and gases into your home when you turn the water faucet on.

Test out all your faucets and see if the odor is limited to specific ones. That will give you a better idea of the location of the clogged or slow drain.

Why is my water cloudy? This comes down to water pressure and water temperature. In colder months, since colder water holds more air than warmer water, you’re seeing an excess of harmless, trapped air.

The water that comes out of your faucets is under pressure, meaning it can also hold onto



Our certified laboratory professionals meticulously examine your water and perform over 100,000 tests per year.

excess air. If you open your tap to find some cloudiness, just let the water settle for a minute or two. It should go back to being crystal clear shortly!

What are PFAS? Does PWSA test for PFAS? Also called “forever chemicals,” PFAS are a group of thousands of synthetic chemicals that have been widely used in industrial and consumer products, contributing to their presence in water.

PWSA has been proactively monitoring for PFAS since 2018 as a precaution. Since then, we’ve never exceeded the Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed limit of 4 parts per trillion for PFOA and

PFOS. We test for 29 different types of PFAS quarterly.

Why is my water brown? Brown water is different than cloudy water. If you’re experiencing discoloration, we recommend running your faucet on cold at the lowest point of your home until the water runs clear, which may take 10-15 minutes — then use it as normal.

If your water does not clear after, please call PWSA 24/7 Emergency Dispatch at [412-255-2423](tel:412-255-2423).

For more information on water quality, please see our [Is My Drinking Water Safe?](#) fact sheet or visit our [Water Quality & Treatment](#) webpage. ♦

PWSA's Customer Assistance Programs Applauded

► PWSA Customer Assistance Programs are designed to provide financial relief for income-qualified residential customers who are having difficulty paying their water, sewer, and stormwater bill. Our organization and the team responsible for administering these programs, **PGH2O Cares**, was recognized as a leader in this space in a recent WESA article: [Pittsburgh water utilities increase aid to low-income customers — but not equally](#).

In the piece, we're introduced to a Garfield customer who participated in our [Line Repair and Water Conservation Pilot Program](#). One of the first of its kind in Pennsylvania, the program pairs income-qualified customers with a professional plumber, who will repair

leaks and install water-saving devices in their home at no cost. Through the program, that customer was able to have her leaky sink repaired and her water pressure adjusted for free. She was in disbelief when **her bill decreased from \$240 to \$114**. All told, in the first four months of the pilot program, we assisted 47 customers, who on average reduced their monthly water consumption by 33%.

In 2023, we enrolled our 7,000th customer in the Bill Discount program. Earlier this year, we increased income eligibility for that program from 150% of the federal poverty level to 200%. We also maximized the federal Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) and, since January 2022, have

helped customers claim more than \$2.1 million in assistance to erase the debt of past-due bills.

We've also expanded our Hardship Grant Program, which now includes two separate annual grants – one for eligible drinking water customers and another to eligible wastewater (sewer) customers. Customers receiving both drinking water and wastewater services from PWSA can benefit from both grants simultaneously. The maximum grant will increase from \$300 to \$450.

Still, surveys show there are thousands of potentially income-qualifying customers that don't know about our Customer Assistance Programs. Now and into the future, our Cares team will continue their



Our PGH2O Cares team. L to R: Collin Farone, Eve Kopicki, Ruth Walker, Sarah Visznecki, and Sarah Hall.

aggressive outreach efforts to publicize the programs and enroll as many of our qualifying customers as possible.

Please visit our [Customer Assistance Program](#) webpage to learn more about financial assistance or contact PGH2O Cares at [412-255-2457](tel:412-255-2457). For more information, please see the [full article from WESA](#). ♦

TEAM PGH2O

Employee Spotlight: Rachael Beam



Rachael with her husband.

► Please welcome **Rachael Beam**, our new **Chief Engineering Officer**, to PWSA! To help ensure the continued delivery of vital infrastructure improvements, Rachael will oversee the planning and execution of all PWSA engineering, design, and construction activities.

Rachael brings a wealth of experience to PWSA, having served in various capacities, including senior project engineer, engineering project manager, and most recently, as an engineering manager, for the Pennsylvania American Water Company. In her most recent role there, she led a team of nine engineers, delivering \$500 million in water and wastewater capital projects in southwestern Pennsylvania over five years.

What made you decide to join PWSA? I was thrilled to join the organization and Engineering team during this historic period of investment in critical infrastructure replacement and upgrade projects. This is an exciting time to join PWSA!

How does your role contribute to the delivery of safe, clean drinking water? The entire Engineering team is responsible for delivering essential capital replacements and upgrades to our infrastructure, without which the delivery of safe and reliable drinking water wouldn't be possible. Clean drinking water should be a right, not a privilege, and has been part of my professional passion for many years.

What's the best advice you've ever heard? Not so much advice but a familiar quote: "Being kind is more important than being right." And sometimes, being kind also requires being honest, in a kind way of course.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work? I love traveling with my husband both inside and outside the U.S.

What's the weirdest fact you know? According to the American Kennel Club, for 30 years in a row, the Labrador Retriever was the most popular dog in the U.S. Until 2022, that is, when it was overtaken by the French Bulldog. I'll be interested to see the 2023 winner. ♦

Reading is FUNdamental at Weil K-5

► We love a good book and a fun science experiment, especially when we can share them with our community.

Last month, we joined Reading is Fundamental (RiF), a children’s literacy organization working to bridge literacy and achievement gaps, to host a day of water-themed reading and learning at Pittsburgh Weil K-5 in the Hill District.

Throughout the day, PWSA and RiF combined story time and reading with hands-on activities. Students were also offered the opportunity to select a book to take home and keep.

Our activity with students involved some science role-play, as students imagined

themselves as PWSA laboratory professionals testing a water sample with a fun color-changing pH indicator liquid.

At PWSA, pH is one of the characteristics of water that we pay close attention to during the treatment process. It’s a measure of how acidic or alkaline the water is, and it’s important to make sure that our finished water is within the expected range.

We discussed that pH is just one of many tests PWSA does every day to make sure that our drinking water is safe. Ultimately, our dedicated staff conducts over 100,000 tests on our drinking water each year.



A scientist-in-training checks the pH of their mock water sample.

At the end of the day, students were encouraged to head home, fill a glass of water from their tap, and hydrate.

They had done a hard day’s work of testing it, after all! ♦

DEVELOPMENT REPORT

New RAVE Profile Announced



YOUR SAFETY IS OUR #1 PRIORITY

► Our Recognition and Appreciation of Vendor Excellence (RAVE) profile series highlights our high-performing, valued, diverse vendors. These businesses have become committed partners in providing vital water services while upholding PWSA’s Mission, Visions, and Core Values.

We’re pleased to highlight the next vendor in our RAVE profile series: **Supreme Traffic Control (STC)**. STC is a minority-owned business enterprise (MBE) with six years of experience

providing reliable, safe, and efficient traffic management services.

Last year, STC provided complex and strategic traffic services for our Urgent Lead Line Replacement program, ensuring flexible and prompt attention to requests. When construction necessitated lane closures around Children’s Hospital, STC prioritized ambulance and bus movement without creating delays.

Their 100% attendance and zero incident record helps us deliver on our Core Values of Safety and Accountability.

[Read the full profile here.](#) ♦

JOIN US AT OUR DEVELOPER’S ROUNDTABLE!

Stakeholders, developers, and contractors currently working with PWSA, or those who would like to, are invited to our April 3 Developer’s Roundtable.

During the session, we’ll discuss updates to our 2024 Developer’s Manual. We’ll also clarify the policies and procedures that are meant to enhance the overall permitting process and allow time for an informal Q&A. For more information or to register, please visit our **Events & Meetings** webpage.

PGH₂O

WATER WISE



Is it time to clean or replace your faucet aerators? We may be able to help!

The aerator at the end of your water faucet (above) adds air to your tap water to reduce splashing and limit water waste. Aerators catch some of the silt and minerals that flow through water. Both can build up in your faucet and, over time, impact water quality by encouraging bacterial growth and limiting your faucet’s flow rate.

We suggest replacing your aerators annually and cleaning them bi-annually.

Most aerators simply unscrew from the faucet, but you may need to use a pair of pliers. Once removed, separate the aerator parts, remove any debris, then soak and scrub in white vinegar. Rinse and reassemble the aerator and reattach it to the faucet. If replacing, a low-flow device can save you water and money. For instructions, see this **Installation Guide**.

You may qualify to have water-saving devices installed at home at no cost through our **Line Repair and Water Conservation Pilot Program**. Learn if you qualify on our **Customer Assistance Program** webpage.

Customer Assistance Programs

We offer several Customer Assistance Programs that are designed to provide financial relief for income-qualified residential customers having difficulty paying their PWSA bill. These programs can help lower your monthly payment, reduce past due balances, and offer grants to put towards a balance on your account.

The best part is you don't have to go it alone! Our PGH2O Cares team works directly with our most vulnerable customers helping them to enroll in our programs and identify ways to reduce water usage.

If you think these programs can help you reduce your bill, visit pgh2o.com/CAP for more information or contact cares@pgh2o.com or call **412-255-2437**.



Additional Assistance Programs

Additional assistance programs are offered separately from PWSA's own Customer Assistance Programs. Please see below for a listing of available programs.

The **Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) Clean Water Assistance Fund** is available to eligible residential customers. It is administered by Dollar Energy Fund. To learn more and apply for assistance, visit the [Clean Water Assistance Fund](#) page.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

If you can, consider donating to our [Hardship Grant Program \(www.pgh2o.com/give\)](#).

Enroll in eBilling

Convenient and easy to use, our [online billing and payment portal \(www.pgh2o.com/ebilling\)](#) ensures timely delivery of bills and payments.

Track Water Use

Visit our [Customer Advantage Portal](#) to track water use in real time and receive alerts when there's a spike in water use.

Do We Have Your Number?

Did you know that we call customers during water emergencies and outages?

It is important to verify that we have the best number to reach you. You can even add multiple numbers for your account, so your entire household is informed about our work.

TO UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO:

Call PWSA Customer Service:
412.255.2423 (Press 5)

Visit our [Update Contact Information portal](#).

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