

Acton Water District

Water Words Notice


Spring 2002

Dear Customer:

As we enter the summer season, the Acton Water District is once again embracing the challenge of meeting the ever-increasing demand for high quality water. Our water comes from a variety of different wells that are located throughout the town. As the demand increases, we are forced to use every source that we have. The water that we provide to your tap is safe, and meets all primary drinking water standards. But the aesthetic quality of the water from some of our wells is not as desirable as others. Most New England ground waters contain minerals like iron and manganese, which dissolve in the water from the soil and rock in the aquifer. Although there are no health-based standards for iron and manganese, there are aesthetic guidelines established to help avoid problems such as staining of sinks and tubs. We limit the use of the wells with aesthetic water quality problems as much as possible. However, during the high demand summer months, we are simply forced to use every resource available. For this reason, some of you may experience some temporary, subtle, changes to the water that comes out of your tap. Again, please be assured that your water is safe, even though you may notice a change in color or taste.

We are frequently being questioned about VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds), which are the man-made contaminants that have been found in Acton's ground water near industrial sources, such as the former W.R. Grace site. Recently, you may have seen information regarding the migration of the VOC contamination plumes away from the Grace site and towards our School Street wells. For twenty years, the Acton Water District has been successfully removing these contaminants from the ground water using aeration towers and granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration *before* we introduce it to the distribution system. These processes treat the water and allow us to meet our self imposed, strict limits for VOCs. Our limits are far more stringent than anywhere else in the State. We take water quality very seriously and are constantly working on various remediation efforts. You can be assured that we here at the Acton Water District are working closely with EPA, DEP, and W.R. Grace to ensure that the water delivered to your home is safe. If you have any questions, please feel free to give us a call.

Sincerely,



James Deming
District Manager

Master Plan Update

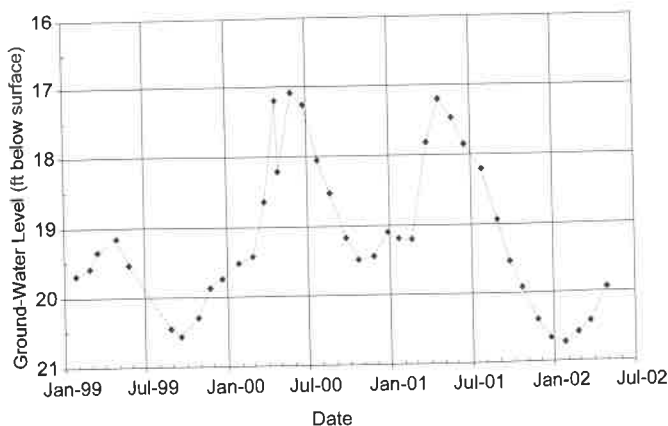
Dufresne-Henry, Inc., the engineering firm retained by the Acton Water District, has recently completed an update of the Acton Water District's Master Plan. The purpose of this document is to provide the Water District with a plan to be used for providing a safe and reliable water supply to the residents of Acton. This report is an update of previous water system Master Plans - the last update being completed in 1996. The report includes an analysis of existing system conditions, existing and future water supply requirements, regulatory requirements, and the ability of the District to provide adequate water service throughout the town of Acton. A copy of the report is available for viewing at the Water District Office, (on Route 111 near the Boxborough town line) or at the Acton Public Library.



Drought Status Update

Rainfall in Acton during late 2001 and early 2002 was well below normal. Despite some heavy rainfall during May 2002, most of Massachusetts is still experiencing a long term rainfall deficit. The Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force has issued a "drought watch" for the entire state. This indicates the need to keep a close watch on our water resources. Central Massachusetts has been particularly hard hit, and groundwater levels at Acton's U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) monitoring well are well below normal, as shown in the graph below.

The heavy May rainfall has so far helped reduce the demand for lawn watering, but the most critical period will be this summer. June and July are typically the months of highest water use in Acton, largely due to lawn watering. Although the Acton Water District's outdoor watering restrictions allow watering lawns three days per week, we ask that you reduce your lawn watering as much as possible. By conserving water we can help guard against further water shortages and the need for a ban on all outdoor water usage. We thank you for your cooperation!



Groundwater levels in USGS monitoring well, Acton.

Leak Detection Survey

Just as we ask our customers to conserve water and check their residences for leaks, the Water District too has to ensure that it is making the most efficient use of water. We check our system regularly for leaks. Over time, underground pipes can wear and crack, sometimes enough that the water traveling through them under high pressure can begin to leak out. Even hydrants can develop leaks. Water and Waste Pipe Testing recently completed a sonic water leakage survey on the entire water distribution system - approximately 108 miles - for the Water District. This survey is conducted by utilizing listening devices that are sensitive enough to detect a leak as small as one half-gallon per minute. A total of fifteen leaks were found. Two were fairly large leaks in the mains underneath the street, but most were small leaks in the small-diameter service lines that bring the water from a water main to a residence. Repair of leaks on private property is the responsibility of the homeowner. All of the large leaks and all of the small leaks except a few on private properties have now been repaired.

AWD Offers New Water Audit Program

As part of an ongoing effort to conserve our groundwater resources the Acton Water District is continually examining water usage trends and seeking ways to encourage our customers to conserve water, particularly during the "high demand" months of spring and summer. This spring we are, for the first time, offering home water audits to selected customers. During April and May, we sent letters to almost 200 customers, notifying them that they are among the highest users of water in town, asking them to take steps to conserve, and offering them a free home water audit. The Water District has contracted with Energy New England (ENE) to perform this service.

Customers signing up for a water audit will be visited by a certified ENE auditor who will gather information on water use habits of the household, provide comparisons of household use to average water use in various categories, check for leaks, and provide suggestions for saving water both indoors and out. Free water saving fixtures will be provided as part of the audit. The Water District will be tracking the success of this first year "pilot" program. If you are a high volume user who has received a letter from the Water District recently, please consider participating in this home water conservation program.



Tom Robinson, ENE Auditor, checks water-conserving fixture.

Clapp Well Redevelopment

The Water District's Clapp Well has been in operation since 1976. It is located across Massachusetts Avenue from the District's main office. Usage of the Clapp well has been intermittent because it is near a buried peat deposit and sometimes produces "tea-colored" water that is high in iron. Although the water meets all state and federal health standards, many consumers find the color objectionable. In addition, the vacuum system that draws the water out of the ground at the Clapp well is not as efficient or reliable as more current pumping methods.

As part of our effort to optimize all our sources of drinking water, the Acton Water District is planning on re-developing the Clapp well system. We have tested several sites within 50 feet of the existing well that appear to be good sources of clean water. In upcoming months, one or several of these sites will be fully developed and a submersible pump system will be installed. We hope this will reduce or eliminate the color problems at the Clapp Well and allow us to more fully utilize this important source of water.



Redevelopment of the Clapp Well in West Acton should make it a more reliable source of drinking water.



Mary Crain Penniman discusses Water Wise Landscaping with Arthur Gagne.

Water-wise Landscaping Course

In late April and early May the Acton Water District co-sponsored the "Water Wise Landscaping" course offered through Acton/Boxborough Community Education. The course was co-taught by Jane Ceraso, Acton Water District's Environmental Manager, and Mary Crain Penniman, an Acton resident who is both a Landscape Designer and a specialist in native plants. The course was filled to capacity. It covered topics such as how to design a landscape that conserves water, modifying an existing landscape to make it more sustainable, and selecting plant materials and landscaping methods that save water.

We Have a New Look!

Our newly designed water bill had its preview in April when we sent it out for the first time. With the new bill you won't have to scrutinize the numbers to differentiate among 8's, 5's, and 3's, as you did with the old bill. You also won't have to "tear here" or "fold there" to make a return envelope.

Did you notice the bar graph on your new bill that shows you the history of your water use? You can use this graph to see how your efforts in water conservation are paying off, and to compare your winter billing months to your summer months. Although the first bill only showed two billing cycles, with each new bill a new bar will be added to the graph and this will continue until the graph shows 6 billing cycles.

We believe this new presentation has brought our billing into the 21st Century. And the entire bill was created and designed by Acton Water District staff and because of this, these new bills do not cost any more to produce than the old bills. If you have any comments or questions about the new bill please call the Water District.

Acton Water District



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Thank you for following all outdoor watering restrictions

Effective May 1 - October 1 every year

- ◆ Even number addresses may use water outdoors: *Tue., Thu., & Sat.*
- ◆ Odd number addresses may use water outdoors: *Wed., Fri., & Sun.*
- ◆ No lawn watering between 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM (watering mid-day wastes water to evaporation)
- ◆ No outdoor use on Mondays to give storage tanks a chance to recover after the weekend