Western Reaches Out to Community to Help End Water Theft

Illegal, unsafe hydrant tapping requires water district to increase security and enforce criminal consequences for violators.

Riverside, Calif. – Western Municipal Water District is reaching out to community members to help the District put an end to illegal water theft. Stealing water is not only a crime, but also it poses serious contamination risks to Western’s water supply and can cause expensive damage to Western’s water delivery system. Additionally, Western’s customers must absorb the cost of stolen water and repairs that can lead to higher rates.

“Western is entrusted by our ratepayers to protect our drinking water resources. In order to eliminate the possibility for contamination and costly damage to our system it is imperative to put an end to all illegal water theft activities,” stated Western’s General Manager John Rossi. “We are working with the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department on increased patrols in the area to protect our customers’ water system, and we request our customers to report these illegal activities to us as well.”

The water theft, also known as “hydrant tapping,” has been occurring at hydrants throughout Western’s service area. The thief typically fills a portable water tank on a truck or a trailer from a fire hydrant. Because the majority of extractions have not been metered, it is likely that no backflow device was used, which increases the probability for harmful water contamination to infiltrate Western’s safe, reliable water supply to its customers.

In addition, hydrant tapping increases the risk for a “water hammer.” A water hammer is a pressure spike in the piping system caused by the sudden closure of a valve, such as a fire hydrant. If a water hammer occurs, expensive and unnecessary damage to Western’s water delivery system may happen.

Water theft costs Western thousands of dollars each year, and much like when goods are stolen from a store, prices must increase for the District’s customers to recover these thefts.

“Western is serious about protecting our customers from expenses associated with unlawful water use,” stated Rossi. “Water thieves indirectly raise the rates for our honest, paying customers and that is not acceptable.”

Security measures have been heightened, and the District has partnered with the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department for regular patrols of the area where the theft has occurred. Criminals will face penalties and risks associated with committing crimes. Violators can be arrested, jailed and/or be required to pay fines.

To report illegal activity, the public can contact Western Municipal Water District at 951.571.7104. Western advises the public to take note of the vehicle’s make, model, and license plate number. Western cautions community members against directly engaging with anyone potentially stealing water from hydrants.

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