

FOCUS ON

Gwinnett's Department of Water Resources Billing and Customer Service: Running the business of water

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Keeping clean, great-tasting tap water flowing to our faucets and managing the wastewater we produce keeps plant operators and engineers in Gwinnett County's Department of Water Resources busy. But what about the business of water? Who handles the payments and billing for more than 400,000 water customers in this county?



DWR front line employees assist approximately 20,000 customers per month.

That responsibility falls to DWR's Customer Care Division whose dedicated customer service professionals do much more than collect money for water use. They're the first line of response when it comes to water conservation, leak detection, and billing. "Often, customers will call in to inquire about higher bill amounts," said **Carol Buck**, section manager. "Our staff knows this could be a result of several things including increased water usage, outside watering, pressure washing, or a leak in the home. If a leak is detected, the solution can be something simple like a minor toilet repair that conserves water and stops the leak."

The Customer Care Division is a one-stop-shop located in the DWR Headquarters at 684 Winder Highway in Lawrenceville where 57 employees handle front line operations, call center, and billing. There is even a drive-through for customers who wish to pay on the go. One thing that all of the employees have in common is a genuine desire to help others.

"They get a lot of satisfaction from just hearing someone say 'thank you very much,'" said Buck. "One of our employees walked a customer through finding a leak that was causing a billing headache. The customer was so impressed that she sent a hand-written thank you letter." Stories like this are all in a day's work for the DWR staff.

The front line serves as the face of DWR and handles a steady stream of walk-in customers. This team handles face-to-face transactions in addition to handling the reporting of cash intake, credit card, and check payments. Approximately 20,000 customers visit each month. Despite the high volume, the staff builds close relationships with returning customers and even knows some by their first name. Some customers still prefer the personal interaction and small-town feel while automated payment methods become more popular.

The call center staff handles approximately 30,000 customer inquiries per month. Agents regularly receive feedback and are coached on different criteria, including call duration and customer service. Currently, they consistently exceed 90 percent of their measurement goals and there is an ongoing push to improve in call quality. "Thanks to ongoing training and a focus on service, we are experiencing a decrease in hold times and the number of customers who hang up before they get to an agent," said Buck.

The billing team consists of seven people who support every commercial customer in Gwinnett. They even bill County-owned facilities and Gwinnett County Public Schools for water use. In addition to handling the monumental task of billing and collecting on individual, commercial, and rental accounts, they help customers set up auto-pay and start or stop service.

The Customer Care Division has been automating more of its functions while constantly improving the customer experience. Several conveniences such as paperless billing, online bill pay, and automated phone payments have been implemented. One of the most notable improvements is the online quick payment that doesn't require you to build a profile before making a payment. All you need is your account

number, meter number, and method of payment. The transaction will take seconds, and you won't have to go through a lengthy login process.

Each staff member attends ongoing training to further develop their skills and serve the public better. "We strive to communicate in a manner that's easy to understand," said Buck. "We are also working on more technical training, so our staff can provide more information to customers with meter or billing questions."

The Customer Care Division's goal is to provide customers with options to make the best decision for their needs. You can find out more about the Department of Water Resources by visiting www.gwinnetth2o.com.