

Customer Response Plan Update – April 19, 2022

Where We Stand

Since the rollout of the Customer Response Plan in February, Columbia Water has made great strides in addressing its action items. One of the key areas of improvement is in the Call Center. As part of the plan, eight new Customer Service Representatives have been brought on board, and our new after-hours call service has gone into effect. This has allowed the Call Center to more effectively utilize current staff.

The results: Even though call volume has increased from February to March, there was a dramatic decrease in call wait times and a dramatic increase in calls being answered in a timely manner. And wait times continue to improve – for the week of April 11, there were 4,592 calls and the average wait time was 1:21 (one minute and 21 seconds).

2022	Feb	Mar
% of Incoming Calls Answered in 10 Min.	55%	92%
% of Incoming Calls Answered in 30 Min.	67%	100%
Average Customer Wait Time	11:42	2:20
Number of Phone Calls	24,211	25,168

In addition to Call Center improvements, the work order backlog continues its downward trend. Even with a large increase in new work orders in March, the addition of a dedicated Project Manager and the use of more contractors has allowed Water Distribution to resolve almost twice as many work orders while reducing its backlog to under 4,000 for the first time since January 2021.

2022	Feb	Mar
New Work Orders	604	997
Resolved Work Orders	442	860
Work Order Backlog	4,155	3,867
Staff	32	33

Customer Care Center

Action Item	Target Date and Status
<p>1 Review Call Center triage messaging and prioritize urgent water and sewer calls by bringing to the front of the call waiting que. Prior to this change, all calls were responded to in order received, regardless of the type of calls. With this change, emergency calls are now prioritized to be answered before non-urgent calls.</p>	<p>Completed – February 2022</p> <p>UPDATES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water/sewer related calls continue to be treated as 1st priority calls and are delivered before all other calls.
<p>2 Fully staff new Customer Care and Payment Center with 3 Customer Service Representatives and 1 Supervisor to address in-person requests, escalated complaints and payment adjustment issues. At our previous location, only 3 representatives were available to assist customers in person, and a supervisor was not available to assist with escalated issues.</p>	<p>Completed – Fall 2021</p>
<p>3 Currently, our call center averages 1200 to 1500 calls per day. In order to handle this high call volume within appropriate response times, 27 Customer Service Representatives are needed. Currently, the call center is staffed with only 12 representatives during the day shift. Through increased recruiting and hiring efforts to fill existing vacancies, an additional 13 Customer Service Representatives will be added to the call center.</p>	<p>March 2022</p> <p>UPDATES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 new CSRs have completed training and are assisting with calls as of March 4th. • 3 more CSRs have completed training and are assisting with calls as of March 18th. • We are actively working to fill 5 vacancies. • Call wait times have decreased significantly.
<p>4 Contract a local answering service to handle non-911 emergency and after hours calls, and route these calls to the appropriate on-call Division staff for response. Bring after hours and weekend Customer Service Representatives to expanded day shift with operating hours of 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.</p>	<p>Full implementation – April 2022</p> <p>UPDATES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MedCom has been hired as the answering services vendor and began after-hours service on March 21st.
<p>5 Hire two additional online specialists to assist with increased on-line chat and email contacts and new on-line water service contract process.</p>	<p>Pending fiscal year – Summer 2022</p>

Water Distribution

	Action Item	Target Date and Status
1	Currently there are over 50 vacant positions in the Water Distribution Division, representing a vacancy rate of over 40%. To address the shortage of field staff, implement a hiring surge to fill vacant field operator positions, with a goal to hire a minimum of 15 new Water Distribution Operator Trainees and assess staffing needs and fill additional vacancies moving forward. This will be done utilizing alternative marketing approaches and temporary agencies, and by hosting open interviews.	March 2022 UPDATES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative marketing approaches to expedite hiring for existing vacancies are already underway. • A career fair is being held April 26 at the Convention Center for all open City positions.
2	Embed a dedicated Project Manager within the Water Distribution organization to assist with implementation and tracking of outside contractor maintenance work.	Completed - December 2021
3	There is currently an excessive backlog of work orders that exceeds the capabilities of existing staffing levels. To address this backlog, accelerate use of private contractors for critical water main and service line repairs.	On-going UPDATE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional funding for 3 contractors will be requested in April to perform accelerated leak repair work through the end of the fiscal year. • Have added an additional \$600,000 in the budget for indefinite contracts.
4	Review existing elevated backlog of yard restoration work orders from prior service line repairs and develop a methodology to contract this restoration work to small, local contractors to supplement existing staff.	Spring 2022 UPDATES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing small local contractors for yard restoration work where water line repairs have occurred is in progress. • Utilizing small local contractors for water meter installations is in progress.
5	Currently, smaller leaks on service lines near meters are repaired by the same crews that are repairing main line leaks. To address this elevated backlog or work orders, develop a meter and service line leak response team and equip the team with smaller, appropriately sized excavation equipment. Staff this team with former meter reader positions that are being reduced due to implementation of the automated meter reading system.	Pending new fiscal year – Fall 2022
6	Develop and implement staff training and recruitment incentives. This includes implementing an on-call stipend for field staff, and developing and implementing Water Distribution Apprenticeship Program modifications.	June 2022 UPDATES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training and retention incentives are scheduled to be implemented in April 2022.

Public Works

Action Item	Target Date and Status
<p>1 Continue alternative marketing and temporary agency efforts to increase applicants for Solid Waste openings and expand these efforts to other Divisions with high vacancy rates.</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>UPDATES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative marketing approaches to expedite hiring for existing vacancies is already underway. • Open interview sessions are held every Wednesday and vacancy rates in the Solid Waste Division have dropped significantly. Yard trash collection is currently on normal schedule. • A career fair is being held April 26 at the Convention Center for all open City positions.
<p>2 Increase starting pay rate for entry positions and adjust existing positions accordingly.</p>	<p>In progress</p>

Customer Response Plan in Action

From the City and Columbia Water’s social media.

