

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (posted 12-2-19)

GENERAL TOPICS:

Does the PIWD notify the public if/when there is a coliform violation?

The PIWD is not required to notify customers of samples that are positive for coliform because coliform does not pose a health threat or require that water be boiled prior to consumption.

What actions have the PIWD undertaken to address these coliform issues?

Whenever the PIWD has a confirmed presence of coliform bacteria in the system, Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) requires that the District hire an independent, certified contractor to perform a full assessment of the water system and identify possible causes of the contamination. In recent years these assessments have indicated that low pressure in the distribution line, thermal inversion in the storage tank and, most recently, the seasonal shut down of summer homes are potential causes of contamination. To address the first, the District adopted standard operation procedures for leak repair that prevents contamination of the system. For the second, the PIWD installed a circulator in its water storage tank. At present, the PIWD is implementing its full cross-connection control plan to address the potential for contamination associated with seasonal shut-down of homes (*refer to BACKFLOW FAQs*) and is simultaneously addressing recent identified concerns associated with the Indian Springs well field.

Why doesn't the PIWD respond to email inquiries?

The PIWD's Office Manager position was vacant for a period of time this year and this vacancy may have resulted in an extended delay in response; however, all email inquiries do receive a reply. As the Office Manager position is a part-time position and some inquiries need to be redirected to a more appropriate person for a response, customers should anticipate that it takes approximately seven (7) days to receive a reply.

How are PIWD Board meetings scheduled and why are time limits set for these meetings?

Rhode Island's Open Meetings Act requires that notice of regularly scheduled meetings be filed annually with the Secretary of State. The PIWD Board is therefore required to set this schedule well in advance and, for simplicity's sake, has adopted a consistent schedule (the third Saturday of the month). The 1:00 pm start time facilitates Board member in-person discussions with PIWD employees in advance of the meeting as necessary to gather information relevant to agenda topics. Members of the all-volunteer Board, like most Prudence Island property owners that are seasonal residents, are often obligated to travel to and from the island on the day of the meeting to attend. To accommodate them, the Board meeting must be completed prior to the last scheduled ferry of the day; requiring that the meeting be adjourned by 4:00 pm.

Why is it necessary to provide a request for a Board hearing or submit topics for discussion ten (10) days in advance of a Board meeting?

The PIWD is required to publicly post the agenda for Board meetings at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance. To allow Board members an opportunity to review the initial draft agenda and submit any additions or corrections for the final agenda, they must be aware of all public requests for allocations of time during the meeting so that they can make an informed decision regarding proposed content. Typically, the draft agenda is distributed to the Board seven (7) to ten (10) days in advance of the meeting to provide ample time for review, response and editing prior to posting. As the Board meets monthly (except for January and August) the required lead time for public requests for content is not considered excessive or unreasonable. *Please note that the PIWD is not required to provide an open-forum session at its meetings to entertain or respond to any topic nor is it prohibited from limiting comment on any topic in a posted open-forum session.*

Why aren't supporting documents (e.g. budget) not provided for public review when the agenda is posted?

The PIWD typically does not incorporate an open forum session at its monthly Board meetings so the opportunity for public comment on these documents is not available; limiting any perceived benefit to the public for advance review. In addition, it is simply not practical to make these documents widely available to the public as the PIWD does not possess the resources or any reliable mechanism for doing so.

Why doesn't the PIWD utilize a social media platform (e.g. Facebook) to disseminate public information?

The PIWD does not have any confidence that the dissemination of materials on existing Facebook pages in use by a subset of island residents (e.g. Prudence Island, Heard Round the Dock..) constitutes a valid forum for customer notifications nor does it have the resources for generating and maintaining it's own social media presence. Even if the resources were available, the PIWD Board would be unwilling to monitor, and unable to participate in, the type of 'open forum' discussion typical of this type of platform. As an alternative, the PIWD Board has developed and maintains a website (www.pih2o.org) to provide a platform for providing public access to information. This forum is available to a broader customer base and provides more consistent access to relevant content.

Why does the Moderator dominate and control the conversation in Open Forum discussions?

It is the role of the Moderator to preside over the meeting and keep the discussion on point. If, in their opinion, it is more appropriate and/or efficient to respond to a question directed to a specific Board member they may elect to do so in order to facilitate the discussion.

Does the PIWD provide access to its financial statements?

The PIWD financial statements are reviewed by an independent auditor annually and a summary financial statement is posted to its website (*see* pih2o.org/pdfs/AnnualReport) as well as mailed (in March) to all electors as required in enabling legislation. Anyone who wishes to view the

complete auditor's report can ask for a copy of that document by submitting their request to info@pih2o.org.

What type of subject matter expertise is required for Board member service?

Members of the all-volunteer PIWD Board need only be qualified electors of the district. Qualified electors must be inhabitants of the district who are at least eighteen (18) years old and: (1) qualified to vote for town officers; or (2) property owners within the service area; or (3) rate payers within the service area. That being the case, the PIWD is fortunate to have Board member representation that cumulatively contributes a broad array of experience and subject matter expertise to facilitate oversight of district operations. Qualifications of the current Board members include a history of public and organizational service to their communities serving in a variety of roles; participation in long-term groundwater investigations; and, decades of experience in water system operations.

Would it be possible for another larger department/organization to take over management of the PIWD?

Although the Board has, at various times, light-heartedly (and not so light-heartedly) threatened to collectively quit their positions, and it has always been possible for one or more Board members to be removed by voter recall, the financial repercussions of such actions would be significant. By Charter, the District is deemed an essential public function and as such it would be necessary to continue operations without interruption. If another entity was ordered to take on responsibility for the District (which arguably it cannot be forced to do), one of the first responsibilities of that entity would likely be to investigate all aspects of the PIWD's water distribution system and ensure that any aging or substandard infrastructure be promptly replaced. The cost of these investigations and distribution line/connection replacement would need to be borne by PIWD customers. In addition, annual operations costs would undoubtedly increase significantly.

BACKFLOW:

What has the PIWD been doing to explain the backflow installation process in detail to its customers?

The PIWD developed Customer Guidelines and, with the help of one of its customers, provided schematics illustrating proper backflow placement associated with a variety of home construction types. These documents, as well as more recent information regarding permitting requirements are available on the home page of the PIWD's website (www.pih2o.org). In addition, the PIWD hosted a public workshop on its cross-connection control plan and backflow preventers on June 15th, 2019.

What type of backflow preventer do I need to install in my home?

With few exceptions, customers are required to install a residential dual check valve. The make and model of appropriate residential dual check valves can be found in the Customer Guidelines.

Note that the installation of a dual check valve causes a closed plumbing system and the installation of a thermal expansion tank is generally recommended. In rare instances where the customer has a high hazard situation such as an irrigation system or well on the property, a reduced pressure principle backflow preventer (RPZ) or similar would need to be installed.

Why is the PIWD requiring all customers to install backflow devices?

In accordance with RIGL 46-13-22, all community public water systems were required to develop a cross-connection control plan by 2012 to protect the public water system distribution and transmission infrastructure from contamination through cross-connections. These plans are currently being implemented by public water systems across the state. The PIWD had intended to fully implement its cross-connection control plan with a completion date in 2017 but was forced to delay that activity due to other priority projects requiring attention. In 2018, due to repeat positive samples for coliform and the assumption that the seasonal shutdown of summer homes was the cause of contamination, RIDOH ordered the PIWD to permanently begin chlorinating the water system which would necessitate the construction of a treatment plant as well as an extension of the distribution line. The PIWD Board felt this solution would be unaffordable as it would drastically and permanently increase the water service charge for the 350 homes on the water system and appealed the order. Upon meeting with RIDOH, both parties agreed to an alternative strategy requiring the full and accelerated implementation of its cross-connection control plan as a mechanism to address the issue of repeat positive coliform samples. The plan requires that all water customers install a back-flow prevention device on or before August 1, 2020.

What happens if the installation of backflow preventers does not solve the recurring contamination problem?

RIDOH will force the PIWD to construct a chlorination system (which would require a treatment plant as well as an extension and reconfiguration of its distribution line) and begin chlorinating the water by July 1, 2021. *Please note that full implementation of the PIWD's cross-connection control plan would be required within the next few years, regardless of any perceived potential to resolve the District's current recurring contamination issue.*

What happens if I choose not to install a backflow preventer on my property?

The PIWD and its customers must achieve 100% compliance with the installation of backflow prevention by August 1, 2020 or RIDOH will force the District to begin chlorinating the water (necessitating additional infrastructure upgrades) by July 1, 2021. Any PIWD customer without a back-flow prevention device installed and inspected by August 1, 2020 will have their water service disconnected. The disconnection of water service to a customer obligates the PIWD to inform the Town of Portsmouth that water service has been shut off and the Town's Building Inspection Department would likely condemn the home until corrective actions to restore water service are completed. The cost to install a new PIWD water service connection is two thousand dollars (\$2000).

Are permits required for the installation of backflow preventers?

The PIWD had anticipated (and confirmed with representatives of the Town of Portsmouth) that the installation of backflow preventers, which had been mandated by a public utility, would not require a plumbing permit. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case. Customers should refer to the Permitting Information provided on the PIWD website's home page for an overview of the permitting process (pih2o.org/pdfs/PermittingInfo).

Will the PIWD be providing backflow preventers at bulk rate cost to its customers (as indicated in the Request for Assistance form sent out this past spring)?

Unfortunately, the PIWD was not able to realize cost-savings for its customers through the bulk purchase of backflow preventers due to local vendor markup or added postage costs. As a result, the PIWD has determined that it is more cost-effective for customers to purchase the appropriate backflow preventers for themselves or have the plumber they engage to perform the work provide it.

What actions has the PIWD taken to provide customer support for the installation of backflow preventers?

In addition to generating Customer Guidance materials, the PIWD sent out Request for Assistance forms to all its customers in the spring of 2019 to facilitate the installation process through the collection of customer contact information and basic information about customer needs. Information from the approximately 100 responses information was shared out to each of two certified backflow installers that had been identified and solicited by the PIWD to perform backflow installations. Unfortunately, one of the backflow inspectors engaged to perform the work is no longer available. The PIWD has since identified two additional installers, both of whom wish to set aside scheduled days for backflow installations so that they can make the most of their time and share ferry travel costs among multiple customers. Typically, installers are only able to perform 4 to 6 installations in a day. Customers will need to take responsibility for calling individual contractors to get on their list for installations on a pre-scheduled date. Attempts to provide a pre-set schedule this fall were not successful because customers did not take advantage of this opportunity. However, the PIWD will try again in the spring and summer of 2020 to solicit contractors and develop additional opportunities for the work to be performed.

Please note that it is very challenging to attract potential installers to come out to the island because they are required to tie up their crew and equipment for the day. Last minute cancellations of scheduled work, which has apparently occurred with some frequency, makes the prospect of performing work on the island even less appealing to them. To reach full compliance the PIWD, with community support, will need to engage, and retain, multiple contractors that are willing to perform backflow installations on the island.

Is it possible to have any of the required actions (e.g. installation, permitting, and inspection) completed if my house is shut down for the season?

Assuming you have some means of providing access, it is easier to have the installation performed when the water is shut off. Similarly, neither permitting or the inspection are dependent on the house being open for the season or occupied at the time the work is being performed.