

EFCN: Smart Management for Small Water Systems



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Smart Management for
Small Water Systems

Keeping the Water on During & After the COVID-19 Pandemic

About IB Environmental

Core Competencies



Water Affordability & Equity



Funding Sources



Stormwater & Watershed Management



Caribbean Environmental Management

- Work with local utilities and their partners to develop and improve customer assistance programs (CAPs)
- Design CAPs that ensure water services are well-funded but also accessible to low-income customers
- Work on policies related to affordability at the state and national levels

Outline

- Addressing nonpayment through:
 - Shutoffs
 - Customer Assistance Programs (CAPs)
 - Restricted flow (lowering bills)
- Practical tips on lowering operating costs



POLL 1

About what % of increase in non-payment are you seeing due to COVID-19 (since March 2020)?



SHUTOFFS

Shutoffs have traditionally been an important tool in getting customers to pay their bills



Suspended Water Shutoffs Nationally

- No federal moratorium on shutoffs
- But, as of 06/17/2020, at least 16 states (+ DC and Puerto Rico) have had statewide moratoria

Existing Moratoria	MI, CA, NC, OH, WI, ME, NH, IN, <i>DE</i> , WA, <i>MD</i> , KY, NY, DC, PR
Expired Moratoria	KS, MS, MT



Source: <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/larry-levine/governors-safe-clean-water-essential-covid-19-crisis>

Activity – Raise your Hand if ...

- A. Your utility is under a STATEWIDE moratorium on shutoffs
- B. Your utility VOLUNTARILY suspended shutoffs
- C. Your utility is actively shutting off customers right now



Implications of Statewide Orders

- Utility has less control in “moratorium” state
- But, *all* utilities in a given “moratorium” state have the **same** guidelines
- Without statewide order – when does a utility start disconnections again?
 - No utility wants to be the first



Recommendations in the Absence of Statewide Orders

- Utilities in the state can band together on when shutoffs begin again
 - Focus virtual sessions on viable options for the specific state
- Good (written) communication with customers:
 - Reconnection options for pre-COVID-19 shutoffs
 - Late fee waivers policy
 - Interest charges policy
 - Reconnection fee waivers policy
 - Flushing lines on reconnection
 - Assistance program options



IDENTIFYING THE NEEDY

Focusing on customers who really NEED help



POLL 2

How concerned are you that “bad actors” who CAN afford to pay their bills are taking advantage of the COVID-19 situation to not pay?



How do utilities deal with those bad actors who choose not to pay?

- First identify them
- Be less lenient:
 - Don't waive late fees etc.



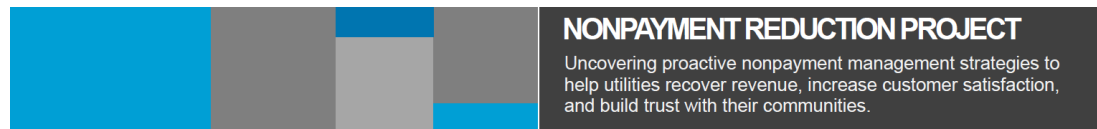
Identifying those Who CAN'T PAY (I)

- Use 3rd party Human Services and Charitable Groups
 - **Albany, GA Example:**
 - <https://salvationarmygeorgia.org/albany/>
 - <https://give.salvationarmygeorgia.org/give/173021/#!/donation/checkout>
 - Specific “Albany Corps”
 - Maybe add a note that this is for water customer assistance only
 - <https://www.unitedwayswga.org/response-covid-19>



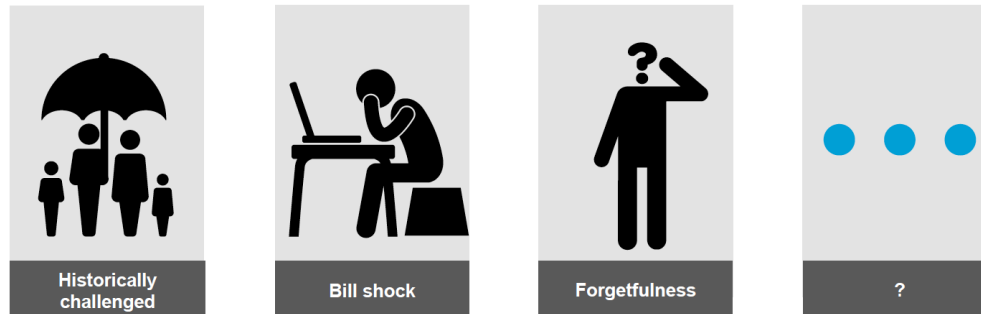
Identifying those Who CAN'T PAY (II)

- Use Utility's Customer Service Staff
 - They usually have a sense of customers who REPEATEDLY call for help
- Customer Segmentation and Targeted Messaging



*** Residential customers have different reasons for not paying their water bill**

With advanced customer data + machine learning, Xylem identifies customers at risk of nonpayment. How do these differ across service areas, and what actions can utilities undertake based on the cause?



Slide Source: Valor Water Analytics, a Xylem Company

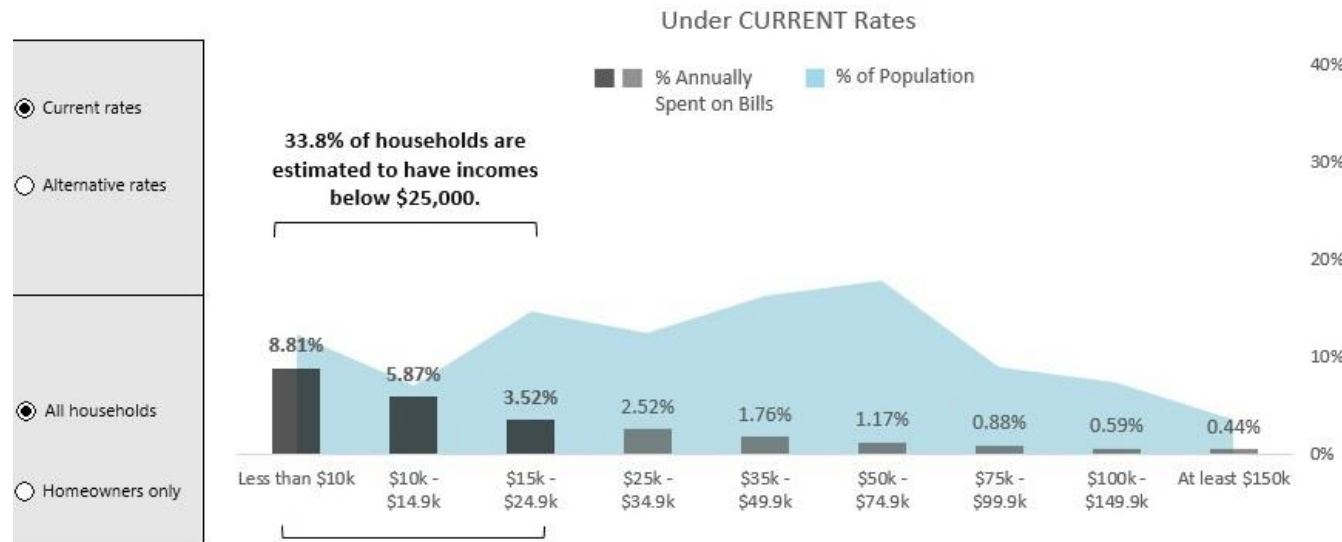


Identifying those Who CAN'T PAY (III)

Can you define this with income levels?

Water And Wastewater Residential Rates Affordability Assessment

- 33.8% of residential customers had less than \$25,000 in annual income
- These households would have spent more than 3.52% of their income on water & wastewater
- 12.2% of households would have spent more than 8.81% of their income



Tool Source:
<https://efc.sog.unc.edu/resource/water-and-wastewater-residential-rates-affordability-assessment-tool>

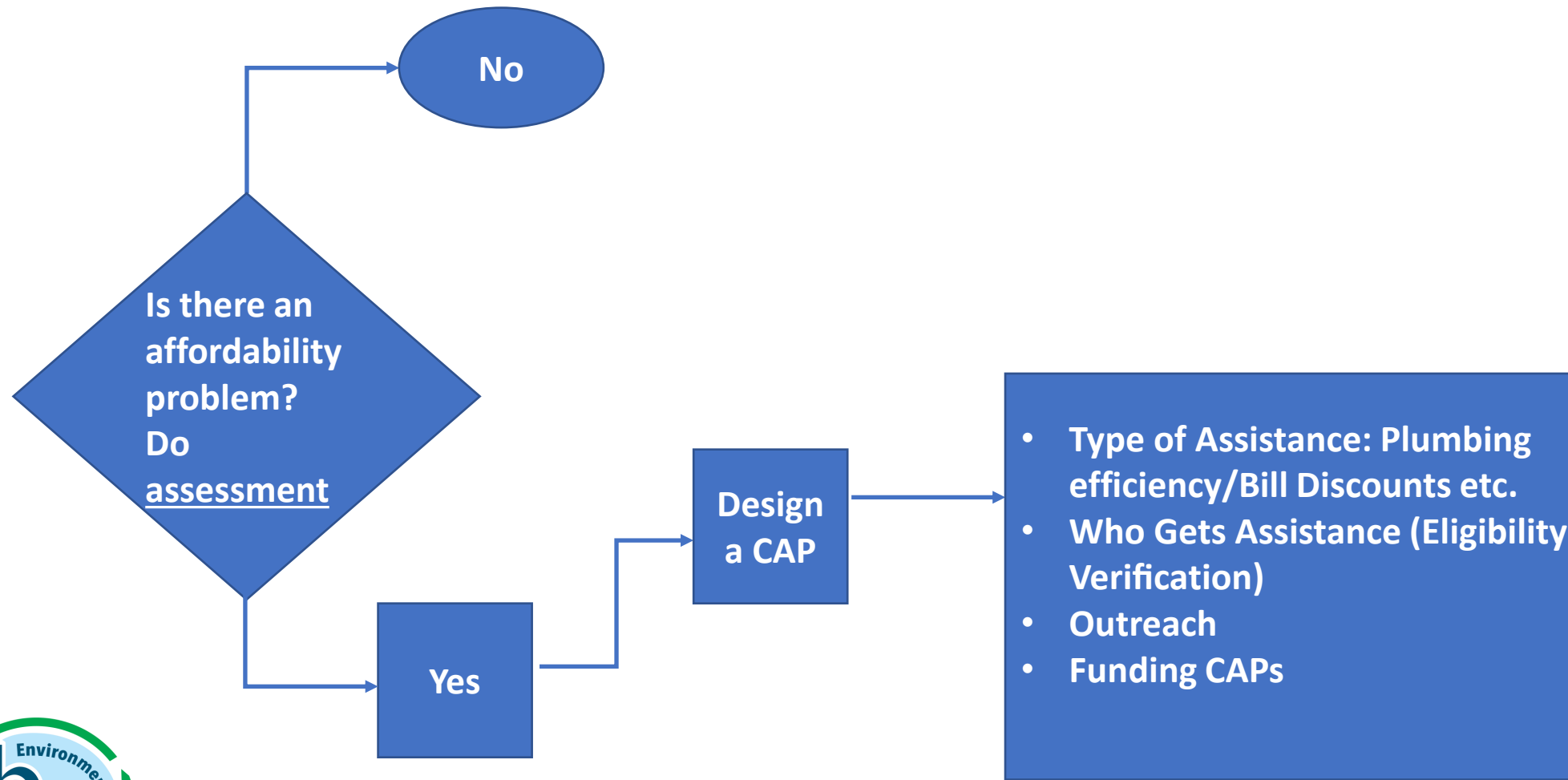


CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

for those who really need it



Process to Design a Customer Assistance Program (CAP)



RESTRICTED FLOW

Lowering bills



Restrictor Plates – Synonyms

- Phoenix – Restrictor Plates
- South Africa – Aerator Inserts
- South Africa – Water Management Devices
- Flow Limiter
- Water flow restrictors
- Throttle (valve)



Cape Town: What is a Water Management Device (WMD)?

- An electronic device installed with your water meter
- A programmable device to provide a daily allocation based on affordability
- Enables households to monitor their available water *allocation*
- A tamperproof device which shuts off when vandalized
- Able to detect water leaks



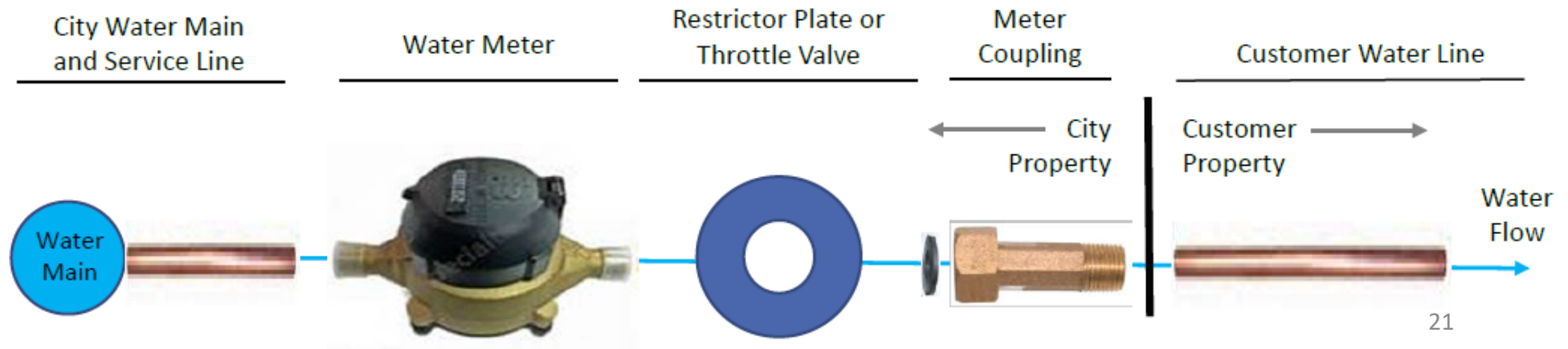
THINK WATER
CARE A LITTLE. SAVE A LOT.



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA
STAD KAAPSTAD

Minimal Water Delivery (Restrictor Plate / Throttle Valve)

- Instead of turning off customers for non-payment, staff could install a restrictor plate or throttle valve at the water meter, which would provide minimal water to the customer; enough for cooking and drinking.
- Pro's
 - Plate/valve would be installed on at the meter in-lieu of turning off the water service for non-payment
 - We would no longer turn-off any customer for non-payment
 - Would eliminate hot weather (extreme weather days) no turn-off exceptions
 - Restrictor plate can be designed to provide the desired water supply (1/8 – 1/16 gal)



POLL 3

Do you think that the restrictor plates are feasible for your water utility?



PRACTICAL TIPS ON LOWERING OPERATING COSTS - *VEHICLES*



Borrowing Vehicles

- Some local gov't departments have **less** activity during COVID-19
- Water staff may borrow those department vehicles to achieve physical distance – 1 operator per car
- If your utility is doing something like this, please raise your hand
- If you have other good practices related to vehicles, add to the Q & A box



Operators Taking Vehicles Home

- Some smaller utilities are letting operators take utility vehicles home
 - Start workday from their house = more efficient than going to office first
 - Operators given their tasks the day before
- No or fewer overtime hours (cost savings)



Outline (revisit)

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Questions

Reminder to share experiences in the Q & A box too