

July 29, 2015

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Having just finished reading Amy Vickers report of findings about United Water NY (*Project Findings: Phase 1—Water Data Analysis to Support a Water Conservation Feasibility Study - June 27, 2015*), it was coincidental that I had a personal experience with said utility over the past week that confirms one of Ms. Vickers' key findings. While my experience is that of a single rate payer, I presume it is indicative of these larger issues contributing to the poor service and lack of oversight from United Water NY.

On Sunday, July 26, we noticed a large patch of extremely wet grass on our front lawn. I emailed United Water customer service, as suggested by their webpage. The response appeared to be automated, and reminded me of their business hours, Monday – Friday, 8am – 4pm.

On Monday, July 27, I called United Water to report the leak. The customer service representative had no record of my email. After describing the problem, they sent a technician out who arrived on Monday afternoon. By this time, the wet patch had grown, and now a large turf “bubble” had appeared (water was pushing the turf upwards). The technician stood on top of it, waved his yellow wand around and said, “There’s nothing I can do, it’s either your sprinkler system or an internal service leak.” He showed no concern for the large amount of soggy turf, and left.

By Wednesday, we had determined that, in fact it was an internal service leak. After assessing the amount of water that had accumulated on our lawn, our plumber determined that it would take at least 48-72 hours for the lawn to dry out enough to perform the work necessary to fix the leaky pipe, and that by his calculation, the water had been leaking since Friday, July 24.

We contacted United Water again, by phone, to request that the water main be turned off so the drying process could begin. The UWNYS customer service representative was in disbelief that I wanted my water turned off. Finally, my plumber took the phone from me, and was able to convince her. She promised to send someone out to our house between 2 – 4pm on Wednesday.

At 4:10pm on Wednesday, after no appearance by anyone from United Water, I called the customer service number again, asking when I could expect the technician. The response I received was, “well if they haven’t arrived yet, they aren’t coming today. They don’t do appointments after 4pm.”

I asked her if she was aware that **countless** gallons of water had been leaking out of this broken pipe since at least Sunday, and that I considered it a very serious waste of water. Her response was, “The water isn’t being wasted. And anyway, why are you worried, the water isn’t in your house is it?”

While I was happy to hear of her concern for the safety of my home, I was shocked that the customer service representative of United Water New York, would not consider that the result of a four-day (at least) gushing broken pipe was not water waste.

Further, when I mentioned that her colleague had promised a technician’s arrival for Wednesday, 2 – 4pm, her response was, “we have other priorities that come before this.” Again, I was dismayed. If a four-day gushing leaky pipe is not considered a priority by United Water’s own staff, then there is no surprise that Ms. Vickers finding #2 *High System water losses have been persistent for years*, is in fact true.

As a rate payer, I find it ironic that I pay for outreach and education about conservation. UWNY is charging me to educate me about conservation, while it appears that their own employee training is to downplay significant water leaks and misunderstand the definition of water waste.

In fact, UNWY director noted the water savings that can be achieved with such steps. *“Water can potentially free up approximately 1 mgd over 10 years, including the estimated effect of projected growth, through conservation programs including, but not limited to, customer education...and others that are detailed in the report. Additional conservation gains can be realized with appropriate support by the county, towns, and villages.”—Christopher Graziano in a letter to Kathleen Burges on June 30, 2015.*

It is also worth mentioning, that it is unclear how the calculation of this lost water might be calculated and then charged back to me, as a rate payer. In fact, ultimately it is a loss to the system on many levels, including the additional drain on the electric grid to produce electricity to facilitate required processing and pumping of the wasted water.

The water main was finally turned off today, Wednesday, July 29. We are moving into a hotel as we will have no water while the lawn dries, and then while the leak is repaired by my plumber. I am fortunate that I have the resources to do this for my family.

While I am just a single rate payer, this experience with UNWY has made it crystal clear to me that United Water has a long way to go in making me believe that they are serious about water conservation, employee training and customer service. Under no circumstances should they be rewarded with increased rates for this poor public service.

Appreciatively,



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CC: Christopher Graziano, Harriet Cornell, Edwin Day

See attached photos.

