



# Seattle Public Utilities

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Water Main Flushing in West Seattle to Reduce Discolored Water

**1. What is water main flushing?**

Water main flushing is a routine operation done to clean and maintain our water system. During this activity, water is forced through underground water mains and flushed out of fire hydrants to remove accumulated sediment. This flushing is done until the water coming from the hydrant runs clear. One section of water main is flushed at a time and can take from a few minutes to over an hour to complete.

**2. Why is this maintenance work important?**

Flushing is important to maintain water quality as well as remove rust and sediment build-up in the pipes. It also allows the utility to operate valves and fire hydrants ensuring they are working properly.

**3. When will the flushing take place?**

Seattle Public Utilities crews will begin flushing water mains in West Seattle the week of April 18, 2016. Most of the flushing will take place at night beginning around 11 pm and ending by 5 am. Some daytime flushing may occur, as well. It will take about 3 to 6 months for SPU to flush all neighborhoods in West Seattle.

**4. How will I know when SPU is flushing the water mains near my home?**

When crews are flushing nearby, you will see signs in your neighborhood that indicate flushing is taking place. You may experience temporary periods of low water pressure and notice discolored water. If you notice discolored water, run your cold water tap for 3 to 5 minutes to see if it clears up. If the water does not clear, turn it off, wait an hour and then repeat.

**5. What will happen in my neighborhood during flushing?**

During flushing operation, residents may hear water discharging from the hydrants and see water flowing in the street near the hydrant and entering storm drains. Drivers are asked to take extra care during this time near crews and if streets are wet.

**6. Will I be able to use my water while SPU is flushing the water mains?**

Yes. You will be able to use your water as usual and you do not need to take any action to prepare for the flushing in your neighborhood.

**7. Is the water safe to drink?**

Yes. Seattle's water is tested daily and is safe to drink. If it is temporarily discolored, run the cold water until it's clear.

**8. Will flushing the water mains prevent discolored water in the future?**

Flushing won't eliminate discolored water, but it will help decrease it by removing some of the sediment and rust that has been resting in the pipes. Flushing helps reduce the level of discoloration and the time it takes for the water to clear when there's a disturbance in the pipes.



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## **9. Why is the water discolored?**

Discolored water can happen when crews operate a fire hydrant, when there is a water main break or leak, or when the water in the pipes is forced to travel in a different direction than normal. When one of these events happens, naturally occurring sediment in the water and rust in the pipes get stirred up, causing the water to look discolored.

## **10. What should I do if experience discolored water that doesn't seem to go away?**

Customers should contact SPU's 24-hour emergency line at 206-386-1800 to report discolored water that doesn't clear on its own or to report any other water quality issue.

## **11. Are other areas of Seattle having problems with discolored water?**

Temporary discolored water happens from time to time throughout Seattle, especially in neighborhoods where there are unlined cast iron water mains, like West Seattle. Seattle Public Utilities receives about 200 calls from customers each month who have experienced a water quality issue, such as discoloration, odor, taste or a clogged filter.

## **12. Is Seattle having the same or similar problems with its drinking water as Flint, MI?**

No, Seattle is not like Flint. Our water comes from two protected watershed in the Cascade Mountains. The land and water is free of agricultural, industrial, residential and recreational use. This means that contaminants have little chance to enter the water, making Seattle's water some of the best in the nation. Unlike Flint, Seattle did not use lead service lines in its system and the water is treated and monitored continuously to ensure optimized corrosion control. Seattle's water is regulated by the Washington State Department of Health and is safe to drink.

## **13. Does flushing waste water?**

To clean the pipes effectively, water must be discharged from hydrants with sufficient speed and volume. The flow is stopped as soon as the water is clear so that only the amount needed to clean the system is released.

## **14. Could the flushing water be saved in tanks or spread on lawns?**

During flushing, water is released out of opened hydrants at a velocity of about 5 feet per second (hundreds of gallons a minute). If released on the ground, that water could damage lawns and landscaping. If released into local creeks, it could potentially harm habitat. Therefore, it is drained to the combined or separated storm drain systems and sent to the treatment facility or dechlorinated and released to receiving bodies of water.

## **15. How much water is used in the flushing program?**

Flushing typically uses less than 1 percent of annual community use. No more water is used than absolutely necessary. Once the water runs clear (confirmed by turbidity testing), the flow is stopped.

## **16. How can I learn more about the City of Seattle's water quality?**

SPU publishes and mails a Drinking Water Consumer Confidence Report to customers annually. This report and additional water quality information are available on SPU's website: [www.seattle.gov/util](http://www.seattle.gov/util). Search "water quality report."

**Have more water quality questions?** Go to: [www.seattle.gov/util](http://www.seattle.gov/util). Search "water quality" or "discolored water" or send an email to: [waterquality@seattle.gov](mailto:waterquality@seattle.gov).