

Customer Assistance

Customer Review Panel

March 20, 2020



Objectives

- Provide an update on work to date
- Highlight program proposals to enhance customer assistance
- Share emergency response in the wake of COVID-19

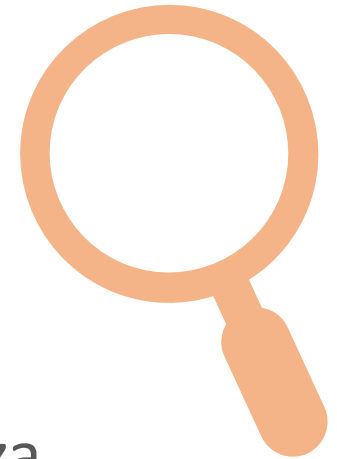
Customer Assistance

- SPU launched the “**Customer Assistance Practice Area**” – a cohesive, utility-wide effort to optimize assistance & affordability, under the A+A.
- Includes a **Customer Assistance Work Group**:
 - Coordinates
 - Shares information and data
 - Collaborates internally and externally
- Goal is to identify unmet customer needs and **develop targeted improvements and tools to optimize** our assistance portfolio.
- Includes all types of customer assistance, such as Utility Discount Program, Emergency Assistance Program, and other programs and tools.



Customer Assistance Panel Presenters

1. **UDP Self-Certification Pilot** – Kahreen Tebeau
2. **COVID-19 Assistance** – Kahreen Tebeau
3. **UDP Shut-off Prevention Pilot** – Cathy Thielen
4. **New Leak Adjustment Policy** – Aurora Mendoza
5. **Side-Sewer Repair** – Kevin Burrell



1: UDP Self-Certification Pilot

Basic Idea:

Allow a limited number of randomly selected households in lower-income areas to enroll in the UDP by **only attesting to** qualifying household information (e.g. household size, income) through a “fast-track” application form.

Purposes of the Pilot:

1. Increase enrollment of qualified households
2. Use predictive analytics to create more efficient auditing techniques and more effective marketing methods
3. Test cost effectiveness for program administration



1: UDP Self-Certification Pilot









Status Update

- Two rounds of mailings successfully designed and sent (in Sept. and Dec.), **reaching 2,668 households**
- Analysis from Round 1 shows self-cert “fast-track” form, combined with mailing, is **8x more effective** than status quo method.
- We’re **learning and innovating** as we go; e.g. adding a reminder post-card to the round 2 recipients.
- By the end of the trial period we will be able to provide **clear data on the impact** of self-certification and different marketing methods.





2: Customer Assistance in Response to COVID-19

Utility Customer Assistance Policies in Response to COVID-19	Residential customers	Commercial customers
Suspending utility shut offs for non-payment		
Allowing for more flexible payment plans		
Permitting expedited enrollment into the Utility Discount Program through March 31. During this time, eligible households can self-attest to their income on a “fast-track” form.		
Reaching out proactively to small businesses with delinquent accounts to set up flexible payment plans		
Waiving interest charges on delinquent balances (pending emergency legislation from the Mayor’s Office)		

3: UDP Shut-off Prevention Pilot



Objective: Reduce SPU's shut-off rate for UDP-enrolled households to as close to zero as possible.



Purposes:



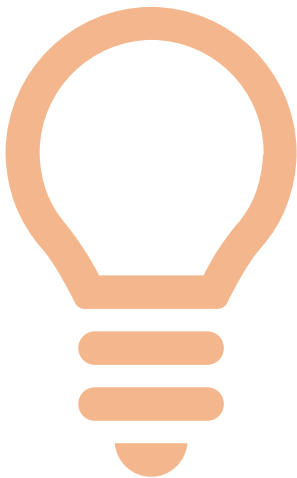
1. Begin to immediately reduce shut-offs through improved outreach and communication



2. Test the effectiveness of expanded Emergency Assistance Program

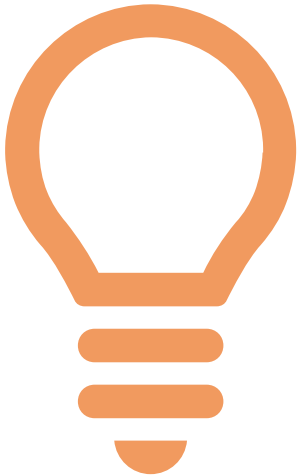


3. Better understand the small number of households that will continue to fall through the gap

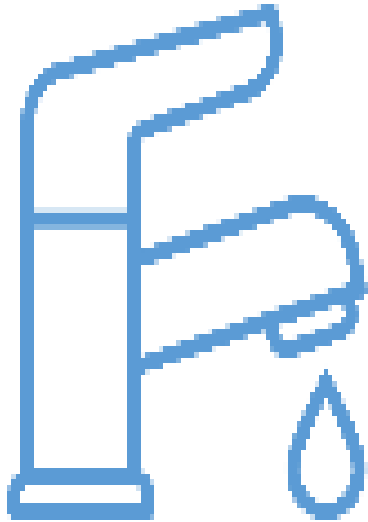


3: UDP Shut-off Prevention Pilot

- July 2019: SPU began leaving door-hangers and calling UDP households facing a possible shut-off, giving them an extra week to contact us about emergency assistance.
- Nov. 2019: SPU's Emergency Assistance Program was expanded via legislation:
 - Allow emergency assistance up to 100% of the bill (while staying within the legislated maximum credit of \$448)
 - Increase income eligibility to 80% of the State Median Income (up from 70%)
 - Allow customer to receive assistance as soon as they receive bill
- Next steps: 1) test new communications and messaging and 2) build predictive model.



4: Leak Adjustment



- **Current Policy**

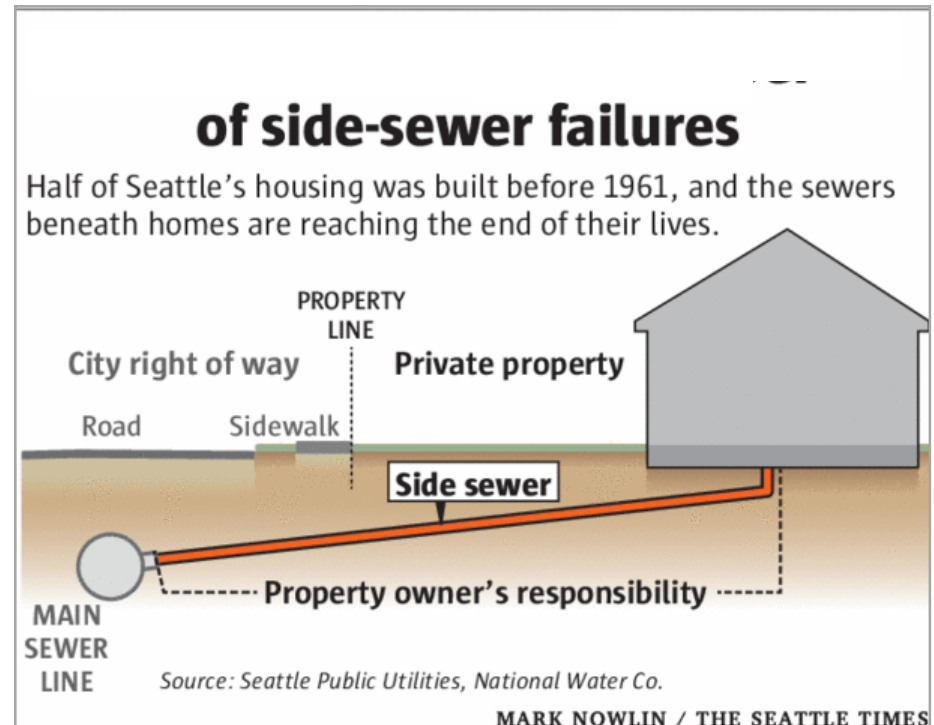
- Outdoor underground
- Outdoor aboveground sewer only for residential customers
- Water bill adjusted at 50% above normal consumption; sewer bill adjusted at 100% above normal consumption
- No frequency limit

- **Future Policy**

- Outdoor and indoor
- Water and sewer bill adjusted at 100% above normal consumption **except:**
 - 50% sewer above normal consumption for commercial customers for indoor leaks
- One adjustment per calendar year



Side Sewers Explained



Side Sewers in Seattle

- 1,400 miles of sanitary sewer mains
- 4,100 miles of sanitary side sewers
- 5,500 total miles of sanitary pipes



Why are side sewers important?

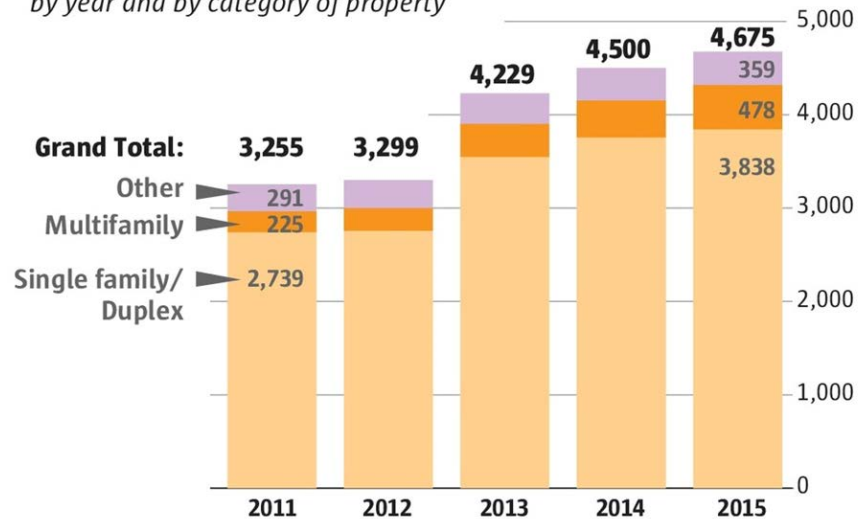
- Side sewers can cause problems for customers and for SPU when not properly maintained, and may also pose a risk to public health & the environment.

5: Side-Sewer Repair Assistance

Permits to fix Seattle side sewers rise sharply

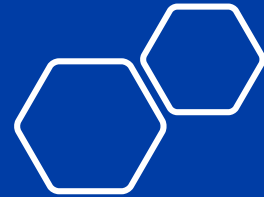
City permits show contractors are keeping busy fixing Seattle side sewers, which are failing in large numbers due to age and other factors.

SIDE-SEWER PERMITS ISSUED BY CITY OF SEATTLE
by year and by category of property



Source: City of Seattle

MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES



Side Sewer Facts



ANNUAL
PERMITS



AVERAGE
AGE



AVERAGE
LENGTH



AVERAGE
COST



More Facts

- Many customers repair side sewers each year
- Some customers can't afford it
- It can be very expensive



Customer Awareness

- Ownership & maintenance
- Navigating a repair or emergency
- Prefer to not know
- Would rather wait

Side Sewer Assistance Program

- Test and pilot options that increases awareness & support customers with the upfront cost of repairing or replacing side sewers

Customer Affordability

- Homeowners who are UDP eligible
- Hundreds per year likely to fail
- May / may not have \$



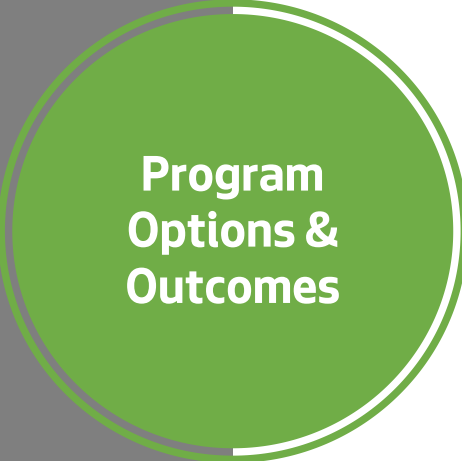
Financial Incentives

- Grants
- Loans
- Rebates

- Scale up to \$1M/year by 2023



5: Side-Sewer Repair Assistance



**Program
Options &
Outcomes**

Program Option	Customers Served	Annual Costs
Rebates	100's	\$100,000
Grants & Loans	10's	\$1,000,000
Utility Insurance	100's	\$10,000,000
Utility Side Sewer Program	1,000's	\$100,000,000

Action Plan Road Map

Outreach
Human-
Centered
Design

2020

Pilot
Implementation

2021

Performance
Measurement
Adaptation

2022

Full Scale
Implementation

2023