

# Voices From the Crowd: Wise Water Usage

By Bill Langmaid

The availability of water is at the heart of what creates a place to live. It is the reason that we build cities at the confluences of rivers. We must have it to survive, and we must have a lot of it to prosper.

In Vernonia we have recently been reading about a Water Rate Study and proposed rate increases to our water bills, and I've heard many people wonder if the rates are in line with the actual needs of the department. So, I did a little digging on the subject.

First, we do have a fairly high base rate in Vernonia. It's not the highest, and it does reflect the reality of our situation. The accompanying table shows the cost of 4100 gallons/month usage in some neighboring towns. This figure is below the nationwide average, but so is our per meter average. There are 757 residential meters, plus 66 commercial, in the city. Those are the accounts which are available to pay for the physical

plant which produces, treats, and stores our water, plus the eventual repair and replacement of that physical plant as it wears out.

It's important to note that prudent fiscal management relies on the base rate to cover fixed costs plus capital reserves. Usage rates should be relied upon to cover the variable costs, like filters and chemicals, which change with the volume of water being used in the system. Things like pumps, pipes, and even water towers are part of the physical plant, and need to be immediately replaceable after failure. One way to do this is by borrowing money, but maintaining a capital project fund might also be prudent.

Another factor that enters into the equation is our water source. We get our town water supply directly from

Municipality	Monthly Bill
Hillsboro	\$17.47
Forest Grove	\$22.44
St Helens	\$26.68
Scappoose	\$31.28
Vernonia curr.	\$40.13
Portland	\$44.91
Vernonia prop.	\$45.10
North Plains	\$52.05

Rock Creek. This is a great quality of water, but unfortunately the supply isn't consistent. Summer brings low flows, and the occasional restrictions on usage.

Winter brings more water, but with increased sediment and the related costs of filtering. In short, we are limited by the source of our water.

The city can't, or shouldn't, promise a water source which they can't guarantee. We need to know that all existing water demands can be met before creating additional demand on the system. While many people recognize that we have an opportunity to increase the population of Vernonia, we have to do so wisely. This means being realistic about our ability to provide water, and at the same time encouraging wise water use by everyone. For one, it saves money, but more importantly it al-

lows for more people to enter into the system and share the resource.

Unfortunately, we aren't included in the program offered via [www.conserveh2o.org](http://www.conserveh2o.org), but it seems a valuable resource nonetheless. One glaring statistic to be found on water waste is that older fixtures use, by design, 30% more water than current designs. The other that stood out was that leaks account for almost 14% of daily water use. Eliminating leaks completely isn't cost effective, but simple things like leaky faucets or toilets are cheap to fix, and the water savings pay for the cost of the repair.

What does it all mean? We have few options for reducing our individual water bills, and it is in the city's best interest to help. Although it does reduce income, it frees up a resource which can be sold to someone else. And, if early indicators bear out, we should be seeing more people move in to Vernonia in the coming years. With some foresight, and good management, we'll be ready.

# County Medical Reserve Corps Celebrates Anniversary

When a nurse and member of the Columbia County Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), volunteered to take free blood pressure readings at the Vernonia Senior Center, she didn't know that she would save a neighbor's life.

What she found was that one senior citizen's blood pressure was dangerously high. She advised him to see his physician without delay. As a result, said Anne Parrott, MRC unit leader, his medications were changed and his blood pressure soon lowered to an acceptable range.

This experience is more dramatic than usual, but Columbia County's 22 MRCs are making a difference even as they prepare for their roles in large scale disasters such as a mass casualty incident, mass dispensing of shots or medications or handling a surge of ill or infected people into the county.

The Federal government created the national system of MRC units shortly after 9/11 to improve the national preparation for a large scale public health crisis. This year the Federal program is celebrating its 10th anniversary. Oregon began recruiting volunteers after a Federal Mandate in 2003, and the State Emergency Registry of Volunteers in Oregon was set up for on-line registration. Columbia County's MRC unit was established in December

2006 and today is one of 15 units in Oregon.

Parrott, who is Preparedness Coordinator for The Public Health Foundation of Columbia County, said that during a Public Health emergency the 22 members of the MRC would be deployed wherever they are needed most.

In 2011, MRCs assisted with influenza vaccinations, helped school district nurses with general health screenings for grades K-6, staffed Health Fair booths and First Aid booths, and conducted blood pressure and blood sugar screenings at senior centers. During the Public Health H1N1 vaccination campaign, the MRCs were a mobile unit that traveled to adult foster homes and assisted living facilities to provide vaccinations.

They have been trained in the incident command system structure, First Aid that includes a psychological evaluation component and basic and advanced disaster training, "all provided under the auspices of the U.S. Surgeon General," said Parrott. They also received training in how to promote Public Health initiatives.

"This year the training for MRCs will be focused on medical surge and the MRC role in mass casualties," said Parrott. She also said that a mass

casualty, such as a large freeway pileup, earthquake or explosion, requires specific training for MRCs, who again would be called on to perform specific.

But all the training and practice is to prepare for a major incident when our local emergency systems are overwhelmed, and a trained corps of nurses will save lives and ease the burden on local services.

St. Helens MRC are Kacie Kraft, Danielle Nelson, Cathy Weber, Robin Loper and Tish Hora; Scappoose, Teresa

McGivern, Carla Coler and Gayle Case; Columbia City, Debbie Johnstone; Deer Island Lowell Norbom; Rainier, Erin O'Connell; Clatskanie, Marilyn Thomas and Robin Ostoj; Vernonia, Monica Petersen and Suzanne Paleck; Clatsop County, Heather Bee.

Those interested in more information can check online at [www.tphfcc.org](http://www.tphfcc.org) and look under the Preparedness section or call Parrott, 503-397-4651, ext 2022.

**IT'S TAX TIME**  
Call your LOCAL tax preparer  
Individual and small business

**PAYROLL PLUS LLC**

Edi Sheldon 503-429-1819  
edisheldon@gmail.com LTC# 29629-C

Bookkeeping • QuickBooks Assistance • Full Service Payroll

**My opportunity.  
Your teacher.**

Portland Community College is proud to celebrate 50 years of creating opportunities that make our whole community stronger... like Nichole, whose ability to return to school means Oregon classrooms will gain one more passionate teacher.

Share your story at [opportunity.pcc.edu](http://opportunity.pcc.edu)

**50** Portland Community College  
OPPORTUNITY - THEN, NOW, ALWAYS.

