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LIVE IN EAST PALO ALTO? WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR DRINKING WATER

Water is one of life's most basic necessities. Humans, plants, and animals cannot exist without water. Water is a natural resource delivered to communities by public and private systems. East Palo Alto ("EPA" or "the City") has a long history of water supply issues. Before incorporating in 1983, the County made important decisions about development and infrastructure needs. Those decisions still affect our residents today. This newsletter answers some important questions for EPA residents about drinking water.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR DRINKING WATER COMES FROM?

EPA's water comes from three different water systems. A map of their service areas is available in [Figure 2-1 of the City's Water System Master Plan](https://bit.ly/3Eod10X) (<https://bit.ly/3Eod10X>).

1. The largest water purveyor is the City of EPA. The City purchases treated water from the San Francisco Regional Water System (SFRWS) and contracts with Veolia North America to provide day-to-day operations

and maintenance services to serve 4,000 connections in EPA. While a smaller percentage of water originates from reservoirs in the East Bay, SFRWS gets most of its supply from Hetch Hetchy reservoir in Yosemite. This water is considered some of the purest in the State. A map of the City's service area is [here](https://bit.ly/3y8F8gP) (<https://bit.ly/3y8F8gP>).

2. Palo Alto Park Mutual Water Company (PAPMWC) is a member-owned water purveyor that serves approximately 677 unmetered residential connections, 20 unmetered commercial connections, and two metered residential connections. PAPMWC service area covers parts of Bay Road, Glen Way, Menalto Avenue (across the Bayshore Freeway/HWY 101), and Donohue Street. Their water is from underground aquifers also known as groundwater. PAPMWC's service area is available in [Figure 2-1 of the City's Water System Master Plan](https://bit.ly/3Eod10X) (<https://bit.ly/3Eod10X>).

3. O'Connor Tract Co-Operative Water Company is also a member-owned water purveyor that serves 343 connections, of which 37 are metered apartments. O'Connor gets its water from groundwater sources. This company primarily serves apartments and homes on E. O'Keefe Street and parts of O'Connor and

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Donohoe Streets. A map of O'Connor Water's service area is [here](https://bit.ly/3Ur7jQH) (<https://bit.ly/3Ur7jQH>).

PAPMWC and O'Connor Water are mutual water companies. Check the FAQs to learn more about mutuals.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF YOUR WATER SOURCES?

It's complicated to understand water supply and delivery to any city. We recommend you understand your water sources for four reasons:

1. Oversight: To whom is your water company accountable? The City of East Palo Alto owns and manages East Palo Alto Water, a public system which serves 80% of the city's homeowners and tenants. EPA is overseen by the City's elected officials. Mutual water companies have their own elected Board and operate outside of the city government. EPA has no say over any water issues related to the two mutuals, which are private, not-for-profit corporations accountable to the property owners in the area they serve. The water quality of all three water systems is regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act, which is enforced by the

California State Water Resources Control Board. All three are also subject to California laws requiring transparency and accountability under the California Water Code. In the case of the mutual water companies, they also must meet transparency requirements under the California Corporations Code. See our FAQs to find out where to call if you have concerns about your drinking water.

2. Quality: What is in your drinking water? Public and private water companies are required to test their water sources. They must share the results of these tests in Consumer Confidence Reports, which they mail to every customer. If you know who supplies your home's water, you can investigate whether the company has any citations for water violations. The City's water quality reports are available on the [City Water website](https://bit.ly/3SQDS9Y) (<https://bit.ly/3SQDS9Y>). O'Connor Water's quality reports are available on their [website](https://bit.ly/3dSNC56) (<https://bit.ly/3dSNC56>). Palo Alto Park Mutual Water Company's quality reports are available by contacting their office. Another source of water quality information can be found on the [State Water Board's website](https://bit.ly/3E1rLS1) (<https://bit.ly/3E1rLS1>).

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3. Infrastructure: Does my water smell and taste good? When a city or house has old pipes, this often leads to differences in the color, odor, and taste of drinking water. It may not harm your health, but it's unpleasant to drink. Some of these problems may come from old pipes in a private home or business, in which case it's the property owner's responsibility to fix the issues. Some of the issues may be due to aging public infrastructure. The City of EPA has plans to upgrade some of its oldest water infrastructure; you can learn more by reading the updated East Palo Alto Master Plan. A city master plan is a planning document that helps guide decisions for the future. The report addresses water quality and supply. [The updated plan is available on the City's website \(https://bit.ly/3gTmNz3\).](https://bit.ly/3gTmNz3)

Some of these problems may also come from secondary MCL violations. A secondary MCL stands for a secondary maximum contaminant level. These are contaminants that do not have a negative effect on the health or safety of water but can alter the aesthetics of the water including smell, taste, and color. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, if these contaminants are present in your water at levels above these standards, they may cause the water to appear cloudy or colored, or to taste or smell bad.

4. Cost: Are the charges on your water bill fair? Do you understand them? Every utility has a different rate structure. Some charge for acreage while others charge for usage. If you are charged by acreage, you pay a set amount for water each month based on how much land you own. Usage rates are based on how many gallons of water you use per month. To understand your water pricing, you must know which utility provides your water. Customers of Palo Alto Park Mutual Water Company have reported unfair billing practices in past years.

By understanding these issues, community members can better advocate for changes and improvements.

HOW CAN YOU HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF WATER ACCESS AND QUALITY IN EPA?

Get involved. Join the Nuestra Casa Community Water Task Force. Our Community Task Force will meet regularly starting in early 2023. This task force aims to help community members become experts on our water system. We will work together to identify the most effective ways to address our water system challenges. Scan the QR code below to join the task force or go to this page: <https://bit.ly/3GHBijr>.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

What is a mutual water company?

Mutual water companies are private not-for-profit organizations. Most mutual water systems are very small and rely on local groundwater. They do not have the financial resources or large staffs typical of most Bay Area urban water systems, such as East Palo Alto City Water. They are subject to many of the same regulations as public water companies.

What is the difference between water that comes from surface water versus groundwater?

Water in East Palo Alto comes from several sources, primarily surface water from the Sierra Nevada mountains and local groundwater. Each source has varying quality levels and issues. For example, the O'Connor Tract Co-Operative Water Company delivers groundwater, and testing has detected elevated levels of manganese in the water. It's safe to drink but contains a contaminant that may not be present in a different water source. O'Connor Water is currently constructing a manganese treatment plant to mitigate this secondary-level contaminant so that the water meets secondary standards of regulation. Palo Alto Park Mutual had a secondary MCL violation for

aluminum levels that was resolved in August 2022. Hetch Hetchy, one of the Bay Area's major watersheds and sources of surface water, is from the Sierra Nevada and is considered one of the purest forms of drinking water available.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR WATER?

If you are concerned about your water, contact your local water utility.

[East Palo Alto City Water](#): (650) 322-2083

[O'Connor Tract Co-Operative
Water Company](#): (650) 321-2723

[Palo Alto Park Mutual Water Company](#): (650) 322-6903

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