

# Acton Water District

## Water Words Notice

Winter 2004

Dear Customer:

Fortunately, Acton largely escaped the great power outage of the summer of 2003. On behalf of those of you who called in the aftermath of the outage, I would like to take this opportunity to explain exactly what effect the loss of power does and does not have on the potable water that is delivered to your home.

In any given year there are often a number of weather-related events that cause power outages in some portions of the community. When these events are part of a long-term forecast, things like hurricanes or major snow storms, the media will quite often provide their viewers with a list of recommendations to prepare for the potential loss of power in their homes. We are also faced with the possibility of "blackouts", the immediate, and often unexpected, loss of power brought on by problems within the grid. Finally, the unfortunate reality of our lives today is that we must also be aware of the possibility of someone intentionally sabotaging our power generation and distribution system as part of some broader terrorist activity. In any and all of these cases you may hear about the need to "stock pile" water.


At any given time, the Water District has approximately eight million gallons of water that has been pumped from the ground, treated, and stored in one of the four elevated storage tanks that are part of our distribution system. Of those eight million gallons, at least half is immediately usable. In other words, four million gallons of water has been pumped up to an elevation where it can be used by everyone, under normal pressure conditions, simply by allowing it to flow by gravity back into the distribution system. At our present demand we could easily supply at least two full days of water throughout Acton, without pumping any more water. Also, we have gas powered generators at three of our well and treatment plant locations and can continue to pump and treat water for an extended period of time, even without electricity.

What this all means to you is that there will be no noticeable effect on your potable water supply during any short term power outage. Unlike someone who is dependent on a private well where the loss of power may also mean a loss of water, your supply will continue uninterrupted for the foreseeable future. There is really no need for you to stock pile water, as you will be able to draw water just as you normally would.

Obviously, if the event is catastrophic, and the loss of power is going to go on for days, then you should make every effort to conserve your water use to prolong the period of time that it will be available. If that were to happen, those of you in the higher elevations would notice a loss of pressure first, and eventually, the possibility of no water at all. This would only happen if the power outage was both very widespread (including neighboring communities) and was to last for multiple days. Certainly, in the unlikely event of a catastrophe of these proportions, all of the resources of the Acton Water District and the town of Acton would be put to use to inform you of the circumstances and to guide you in how to proceed.

Limited power outages are quite common. We experience many of them throughout the course of the year. Generally, at least in terms of your public water supply, they go completely unnoticed by the consumer. The Acton Water District is prepared for those circumstances and you can be assured that we will continue to do everything possible to provide you with an uninterrupted supply of potable water.

Sincerely,



James L. Deming  
District Manager

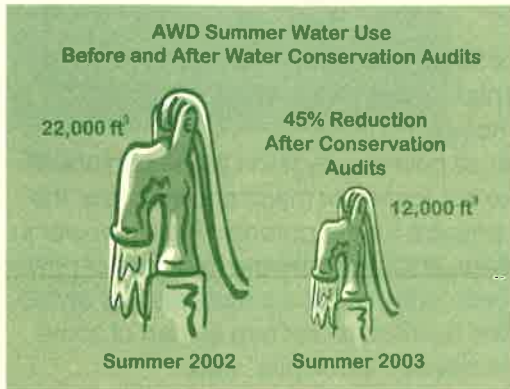


*Storage of water, in above-ground tanks like this standpipe at Great Hill, can provide water in times of power outages.*



## Audits and Landscape Consults Save Water!

During the summer of 2003 a number of customers with very high water usage were sent a letter by the Water District and were offered a free home water audit and a sustainable landscape consult. Fourteen households took advantage of the home audit offer. These customers were visited by a certified Energy New England auditor who gathered information on water use habits of the household, checked for leaks, provided comparisons of household use to average water uses in various categories, and provided suggestions for saving water both indoors and out. Free water saving fixtures were provided as part of the audit.



Participants in water conservation audits last summer were able to decrease their water use by forty-five percent!

Free water saving fixtures were provided as part of the audit.

The success of this program in helping customers save water was exceptional. Of the fourteen participating households, all showed a substantial reduction in water usage after the audit. Overall, there was a laudable forty-five percent reduction in usage in participating households. Several participants were able to conserve enough water to save hundreds of dollars on their water bill!



The elder statesman of the Water District's storage facilities has perched atop Great Hill since 1912. The latest inspection showed the riveted-steel Great Hill tank to be in good shape, but in need of a new "cap". The integrity of storage tanks is critical, so a brand new custom "hat" was designed for the tank. It took a sixty-ton crane and crew of several engineers to hoist and weld the new cap in place, giving it a jaunty, more modern look.

## MTBE Update

MTBE (methyl-tertiary butyl ether) is a fuel oxygenate that has been added to gasoline since the 1980s. It is estimated that MTBE contamination has affected almost twenty percent of Massachusetts public water supplies. The issue of MTBE contamination of groundwater has garnered much press recently. A provision limiting the liability of companies involved in MTBE manufacture is said to have been a major factor in the delay of the 2003 Energy Bill before Congress.

The School Street and Assabet wellfields have shown low levels of MTBE in the raw water. Much of the MTBE is removed by the aeration treatment systems prior to distribution. MTBE does not yet have a health-based standard, but the Massachusetts DEP has adopted a guideline of seventy parts per billion. The highest concentration of MTBE in treated water at the School Street or Assabet Wellfields is 5 parts per billion. The AWD is currently obtaining cost estimates for upgrades of our aeration towers to fully remove MTBE.

## WR Grace Site Human Health Study

The human health risk assessment phase has begun on Acton's WR Grace Superfund site. Consultants to WR Grace and others are currently analyzing a myriad of possible human health effects stemming from contamination at the site. In conjunction with this, the Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry (ATSDR) is also conducting a public health assessment on the site. ATSDR plans to release a public draft of their report in the spring of 2004. For more information on the study, please contact: Robert Knowles, Lead Health Assessor, ATSDR 404-498-0426.

## October Special District Meeting

On October 7, 2003, the Acton Water District held a special district meeting to vote on expenditures for the replacement of the Assabet One Well, local adoption of the Massachusetts Early Retirement Incentive, and a contribution of fifteen thousand dollars toward the purchase and protection of a parcel of land abutting the School Street Wellfield. All articles passed unanimously.

The next Water District Meeting will be our Annual Meeting on March 17, 7:30 PM at the Acton Public Library. All residents are welcome to attend! The Water District's Annual Report, containing all the warrant articles, should arrive in the mail by early March.

## Annual Outdoor Water Use Restrictions

Sometimes residents ask us why our outdoor water use restrictions go into effect every year (May 1 through October 1) regardless of the amount of rainfall we have received. It is important to understand that rainfall (or the lack thereof) is not the only thing that necessitates conservation. May through October is Acton's high demand period, with many customers turning on their sprinklers, filling their pools, and generally using more water outdoors. Regardless of the water levels in our wells, our facilities can only safely pump and distribute a given amount of water.

Acton quickly approaches this amount on summer days when many customers are running their sprinklers. Without water use restrictions we run the risk of pumping the water out of our wells more quickly than it can be recharged, precipitously drawing down the fire reserves in our storage tanks, losing pressure at certain homes, and not providing sufficient down time for pumps and facilities. The seasonal restrictions help to spread out water usage across town and across time, and hopefully help avoid more drastic conservation measures. Acceptance of, and compliance with these seasonal restrictions is generally excellent, and we thank everyone for their continued cooperation!



## Recycle Old Cell Phones and Printer Cartridges at the AWD

Did you know that some companies can recycle your old cell phones and printer cartridges and make them into useful products? The Acton Water District has a drop box in our front lobby (693 Massachusetts Avenue) where you can deposit these items for recycling. Besides the benefit to the environment, each item recycled provides a small donation to the McCarthy Towne Elementary School, a sponsor of this innovative project.



## Upcoming (Spring 2004 events)

- ◆ AWD Annual Meeting March 17<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM, Acton Public Library
- ◆ League of Women Voters Pesticide Awareness Workshop: April (TBA)
- ◆ AWD Water Conservation Open House and Rain Barrel Day: May 4, 3-6 PM, Acton Water District
- ◆ Newcomers Water Conservation Workshop: May 18<sup>th</sup>, Acton Water District



*Discounted rain barrels will be offered through the Acton Water District this spring. Check your next water bill for a coupon.*



*Acton Water District*



*P.O. Box 953  
Acton, MA 01720*

*Water Words Notice is published twice a year for all customers of the Acton Water District*

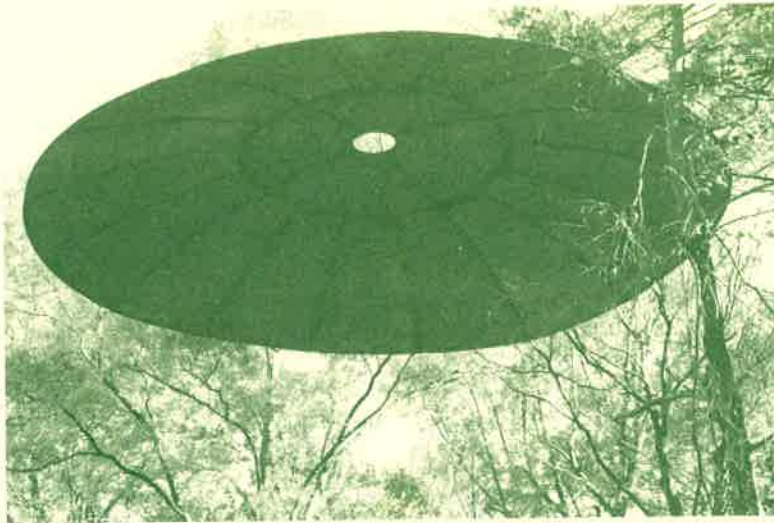
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## *What is it?*

*Please email your answers to  
webgeek@actonh2o.com. Winners  
(and the correct answer) will be  
posted in the next Water Words Notice*