



# COMMUNICATIONS AFTER ACTION REVIEW: *WINTER STORM URI*

*Moving forward with lessons learned*



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# Introduction

Winter Storm Uri was a historic storm, bringing snow, ice, and record freezing temperatures to more than 170 million Americans. Power blackouts were suffered by nearly 10 million people, especially in Texas, where the power grid was stressed to the point of complete failure.

More than 4.5 million homes and businesses across the state were left without power, with some suffering the loss for several days. It is estimated that at least 151 people were killed directly or indirectly by Uri's impacts.

The deaths of more than 20 people in Travis County are officially attributed to Uri, and the storm created an unprecedented series of crises in the Austin area. Austin Water's infrastructure was stretched to its breaking point and an unparalleled number of plumbing failures occurred within the homes and businesses of city and county residents.

Winter Storm Uri also hit as Texas and the rest of the nation continued their struggles with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to remember that, while Texas was beginning to see a sharp reduction in cases at the time of the storm, the state was still recording roughly 10,000 cases a day. As this report will detail, the pandemic's short and long-term challenges directly affected Austin Water's internal and external (public) communications.

During extraordinary events like Winter Storm Uri, stressors are placed on nearly every aspect of water and wastewater providers' emergency response plans and procedures; this is what occurred with Austin Water's internal and external communication processes and activities. AW decided to review several aspects of its Uri response, including their communications plans, procedures, and the work produced before, during, and after the event.

WaterPIO was brought on board by Austin Water in late April of 2021 to conduct the following after-action review. Launched in 2017, WaterPIO is a public communications firm dedicated to helping water and wastewater utilities improve their customer, media, and crisis communications. Its staff carries more than 70 years of water industry and newsroom experience.

A WaterPIO core business is providing crisis communications planning and support for its clients based on its local and national news production experience, as well as its years serving as lead spokespeople for utility and local government entities during several major weather and water emergencies.



## Introduction (continued)

Because of our background and current work, WaterPIO staff is asked to speak at major water industry conferences across the country. One such speech was given earlier this year at Texas Water 2021, which is hosted by the Texas section of the American Water Works Association and the Water Environment Association of Texas.

During our speech, WaterPIO staff discussed the Texas Freeze and gave our crisis communication thoughts related to Uri's impacts on water utilities. We described - through the use of proactive communications - how utilities could recover and even improve upon public perceptions following the crisis.

Austin Water staff viewed the speech and reached out to WaterPIO about conducting an after-action review focusing on its public and internal communications plans, procedures, and content involving customers, consumers, elected officials, community leaders, city and county staff, AW employees, and the news media. A scope of work and goals for the review were agreed upon and WaterPIO began its work in mid-May 2021.

To complete this report in accordance with the scope of work and AW's goals, WaterPIO requested and received all documentation it or AW staff deemed pertinent to the review, including a record of all of its public communication efforts before and during the emergency. It also received links to the virtual news conferences and briefings to the Austin Water Oversight Committee (AWOC). WaterPIO also reviewed the work of the Winter Storm Review Task Force, the listening sessions it held, and the community input provided through the Speak Up Austin website.

In addition, WaterPIO also conducted interviews with more than 20 AW staff members, representing all major emergency response roles, as well as members of staff serving in field operations and non-emergency management roles, to gain perspective beyond AW's core emergency management team.

After reviewing the virtual press conferences and Winter Storm Review Task Force sessions, WaterPIO determined that gaining information from other Texas water utilities about how they handled their public and internal communications during Uri was a top priority. As a result, WaterPIO reached out and spoke with public communication leaders with other water utilities throughout the state. Their geographical locations were to the north and south of Austin, and their utility structures covered municipally-run utilities and independent authorities.



## Introduction (continued)

The interviews were conducted in a manner that provided assurance to the subjects that their candor could not be used against them. The sessions - all conducted over Zoom - were not recorded and the only notes taken were by WaterPIO staff.

All interviewees were informed that, at no time would direct, word-for-word quotes be used. Where an interviewee's comment stood out, the comment has been paraphrased using only a general reference, like "Austin Water staff" to protect their identities. If a comment mirrored those of other interviewees, the interviewee was informed it would be joined together using general terms like "Several Austin Water employees said..." Comments from outside of AW were treated the same way.

All interviews were conducted using the same structure and question process. In other words, every single participant from the Director down was asked the same core questions. Based on the answers given, WaterPIO then asked unique, follow-up questions to gain more in-depth information.

The willingness of Austin Water's staff, as well as city and other utility staffs, to speak with candor about their personal work experiences, as well as share their own opinions about what worked and did not work during the storm, needs to be highlighted at the start. Their honesty helped WaterPIO create a report that we believe will help AW put itself in a position to succeed with its internal and external communications heading into next winter, let alone in advance of other crises that are sure to come.



# Scope of After Action Review

Based on City of Austin Resolution 20210225-006 and the guidance provided by Austin Water's staff, WaterPIO developed a scope of work that provided a roadmap, but not a completely rigid structure, for the after-action review.

WaterPIO would review Austin Water's ability to provide more timely warning notifications; more localized, real-time outage information; estimates of when water service will be restored; and options for communicating with consumers and non-customers, including consideration for expanded use of the city's use of the Warn Central Texas emergency notification system.

Among the work to be conducted by WaterPIO would be:

- A review of the role(s) of Austin Water's Public Information team, and its coordination of effort within the following structures. We would also recommend corrective actions.
  - Incident Management Team (IMT),
  - Departmental Operations Center (DOC), and
  - City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
- A review of customer and key stakeholder communications before, during, and after the incident, focused on the following. WaterPIO will recommend corrective actions.
  - Winter preparedness messaging
  - Water conservation messaging
  - Emergency notifications
  - Website
  - Interactive online map
  - Social media channels
  - Mass media coordination
  - Daily operational updates
  - Frequently asked questions
  - Documents and translation
  - Critical customer engagement
- Post-Precautionary Boil Water Advisory Activity Review for:
  - Community recovery
  - Bill relief
- A review of Austin Water's internal communication processes, with recommendations for corrective actions.
- A review of staffing levels for Austin Water's PIO and Customer Service teams, with recommendations for corrective actions.



## Scope of After Action Review (continued)

WaterPIO is uniquely positioned to assist Austin Water in this area. In 2008, our staff created the first-ever Customer Notification System used by a water utility to inform its staff, customers, and key stakeholders, including the media, about a variety of water and wastewater emergencies.

The system was created in response to state regulator demands to improve the utility's external communications following a winter when more than 2,000 water main breaks occurred. A wastewater component was added to assist with the utility's compliance with a billion-dollar-plus consent decree.

With the approval of Austin Water staff, WaterPIO adjusted the scope of work as it made its discoveries during the content review and interview processes. The areas covered in this report were approved by AW staff after the completion of the First Draft milestone under the agreement.

WaterPIO was also asked to provide the "winter weather" public communication messages it uses with its clients with adjustments based on the information it had uncovered as part of the review process. WaterPIO provided this foundation for revised Winter Weather Preparedness messaging to be used for future freeze events provided to Austin Water.



## Key Findings

During its work on the after action review, WaterPIO discovered several fundamental issues with Austin Water's internal and external communications that, if resolved, will place AW in a much-improved position to succeed during future emergencies.

While these issues cover several areas, it is WaterPIO's opinion that Austin Water has its core team in place - across its divisions - to immediately affect positive change. In order to completely resolve all of the issues discovered during the review, an increase in emergency communications staffing is suggested.

The leading issue WaterPIO found during its review is rooted in how the organization views the roles of internal and external communications during a crisis and its levels of inclusion of its PIO staff during key decision-making moments. Communication strategies and objectives were not fully incorporated into AW's use of the Incident Command System (ICS) under the National Incident Management System (NIMS). While a Public Information Officer role was assigned during each emergency shift, they were not fully empowered.

The Public Information Officer is not elevated to a decision-making level under AW's ICS structure, resulting in reduced level of influence over AW's short and long-term communication strategies. (While the Assistant Director overseeing internal and external communication is an Executive Team member, this is not the same as having a lead role under the ICS.) This also slowed the responsiveness of some of AW's communications and led to issues with customers, elected officials, employees, and the news media. Several employees felt the internal communications structure left them to fend for themselves when it came to obtaining information they needed to do their jobs.

Part of the issue was created by Covid's wide-ranging impacts. For the last year-plus, it has been difficult for Austin Water to conduct the necessary levels of training that would spot and address gaps like those discovered during Uri (NIMS and ICS-related trainings are best conducted in-person.) Discussions with AW staff revealed NIMS and ICS trainings will be a top priority once the utility returns to normal operations.

Another issue that negatively impacted Austin Water, and those assisting it with external communications, were the operational challenges AW faced. While the communications generated by AW were clear and concise, as Uri worsened and impacted AW's ability to accurately assess its water infrastructure, a 12 to 18-hour information gap developed between what was being reported to the public and what was actually taking place in AW's system.



## Key Findings (continued)

We should clearly state that at no time did AW willfully send out false information. However, some of the public information was unknowingly old and quickly became incorrect.

As a result, key communication partners, especially elected officials, were put in difficult positions after they repeated Austin Water's information. This led to credibility issues with AW's public communications during the storm, some of which have carried over into the present day.

While this review does not address changes to Operations when it comes to improving their response, it can be stated that changes to AW's ICS structure and its approach to internal and external communications will lessen the likelihood for future credibility issues.

One issue that was of particular concern for Austin Water's key stakeholders in local government was AW's difficulty communicating with consumers of its water who are NOT its customers, more specifically renters of properties. Austin Water did have difficulty reaching renters who did not have direct billing accounts.

We found AW did its best in this area, which has long been difficult for water utilities all over the country. In fact, when other utilities in the state were asked for their best practices, they stated consumer communication was a significant challenge too. This review does include a plan for boosting public outreach to the consumer community, based on WaterPIO's experience in this area, input from other Texas utilities, and insights from Austin Water staff.

Overall, Austin Water's Public Information Division did an admirable job during a once-in-a-lifetime confluence of challenges. Not only did they have to do their jobs while separated from each other as a result of Covid, but Uri's impact on power forced many of them to have to work out of their cars to keep the public informed.

With these key findings addressed, along with others detailed in this report, Austin Water will be in a much-improved position to handle future crises, including ones which may occur this upcoming winter.



## Uri's Austin-wide Impacts

As mentioned in the Introduction, there is no denying that Winter Storm Uri was a historic event that created an unprecedented series of challenges. As we dive into the impacts on Austin Water as part of this after-action review, it is important to avoid viewing AW's work in a vacuum; we need to acknowledge the strain Uri put on the entire Austin area.

We must clearly state the obvious, not for use as an excuse but as an acknowledgment of reality; Covid negatively affected not just Austin Water but the entire area's key institutions; nearly all of the area's workforces suffered in their responses because of Covid impacts. While entities were able to work remotely because their systems were already established, working in an online environment during an emergency response is disjointed. It is nearly impossible to achieve the necessary levels of on-the-spot, one-on-one interactions that discover and resolve issues with speed, especially when it comes to internal and external communications.

Uri's massive power outages are an extremely rare occurrence. WaterPIO has served as a lead PIO for local governments during major hurricanes; Winter Storm Uri had very similar power-related impacts. The loss of the operation of a water treatment plant; the resulting boil water advisories; field staff being slowed in their ability to get to key locations; reduced and unreliable system data from important infrastructure; and staff working out of cars because they need to connect to the internet are common as major hurricanes hit. They are not common during winter weather events.

While a lack of anticipation for the number of private plumbing failures may appear to be a failure on the part of Austin Water, its assessment of risk going into the storm was appropriate because the historic loss of power simply wasn't anticipated by anyone. The number of private plumbing failures that occurred are simply not a challenge that water providers typically face, if even, even utilities operating in northern climates.

During the various oversight meetings held after Uri, multiple people asked why Austin wasn't as prepared as northern cities for such an event. It must be stated that northern climates face multiple-day storms on a regular basis whereas Austin Water rarely faces them. While what happened during Uri will shape future risk assessments and winter weather messaging, we do not take issue with the assessment made before the event or the public communications based on that assessment.



# AW's Public Information Division

Austin Water's Public Information (PIO) Division consists of 11 full-time staff that cover a variety of external and internal communication responsibilities:

- Communications planning and response
- 24/7 emergency communications
- Media relations
- Community outreach
- Public information material writing and production
- Social media
- Austin Water's website
- Public records requests
- Marketing and advertising
- Graphic design
- Video production
- Photography

As Uri began to take shape, AW's PIO Division carried out its duties as it normally would, with an eye toward the storm being a very typical, one-to-two-day event. As the storm progressively worsened, the PIO Division worked in coordination with the city's Emergency Operations Center (EOC), as well as AW's Department Operations Center(DOC) and Executive Team to address issues as they arose. As the storm response moved into recovery and review, the division worked with executive management on various responses and the high volume of submitted public records requests. It also handled the public communications for the recovery efforts, including water distribution communications.

The PIO Division's initial goals during Uri were as follows: carry out mass media outreach with clear and timely messages for public education; update the website; provide customer/consumer-focused information in multiple languages; and conduct social media outreach, with planning and management of messages, posts, and customer interactions. Under a typical ICS structure, the Public Information Officer serves a direct report to the Incident Commander and has decision-making influence over the utility's internal and external communications. While the Public Information staff was significantly involved in the development and execution of Austin Water's communications response, staff did not have decision-making capabilities over short or long-term communication strategies.

During Uri, a number of staff were serving in their roles for the first time. While they performed admirably, the power outages and Covid-related separation posed significant challenges as they learned to navigate emergency processes in the middle of the storm.



# Emergency Management Communications

## Findings

As mentioned earlier, NIMS and ICS trainings will be a focus for Austin Water moving forward. This, combined with the realtime lessons learned, will surely enable the staff to be better prepared ahead of next winter.

A couple of Austin Water's main challenges concerning emergency management communications were directly related to Covid and the resulting inability to conduct proper emergency response exercises and ICS training. Exercises and training spot weaknesses in communication plans and enable employees to develop "muscle memory" when it comes to their emergency response duties. In addition, Covid created disjointed staffing. While Teams meetings and chats served as valuable fill-ins, there is no replacement for in-person interactions whenever problems arise.

While implemented by Austin Water to cover other sections, the ICS structure did not elevate the communications role to one with decision-making authority which led AW to have a communications response that was heavily focused on operational concerns.

While Austin Water had operational staff in the city's Emergency Operations Center, it didn't have any staff in the Joint Information Center (JIC) due to short-staffing and icy travel conditions. Information gaps existed between city and utility staffs that may not have existed if AW staff had been in the JIC.

Austin Water used the City of Austin/Travis County Emergency Notification System, known as Warn Central Texas, on two occasions: the imposition of the citywide Boil Water Advisory and the lifting of the citywide Boil Water Advisory. Not only does the system have the capability to be used more often for more AW information, but emergency notification systems like Warn Central Texas typically have the capability to aid internal communications through the use of contact lists.

Austin Water used its My ATX Water portal on several occasions with customers. My ATX was extremely helpful during Uri. Using the portal, more than 550,000 texts and 230,000 emails were sent to customers. Its use was well received by those receiving the communications; MyATX achieve a 92% customer satisfaction rating.

The Department of Homeland Security's Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS) was not used. IPAWS is FEMA's national system for local alerting that provides authenticated emergency and life-saving information to the public



## Emergency Management Communications (continued)

### Findings

through mobile phones; radio and television via the Emergency Alert System; and on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Radio. IPAWS automatically alerts everyone in a particular area about an emergency. It also alerts anyone entering the designated area as well.

Elected officials unequivocally stated that they wanted greater integration of the city's emergency notification system with Austin Water's external communications processes.

### Recommendations

Austin Water needs to have a designated Public Information Officer viewed as a top decision-maker for the emergency response during each emergency shift. This would enable Austin Water to look beyond simply fulfilling its operational obligations and address more customer and consumer concerns. The best operational responses can still be viewed as failures if they do not incorporate proper, public-focused communications.

We support Austin Water's stated priority to conduct emergency response plan-related exercises and recommend that they use public communication injects. Injects are additions made to the original exercise to test the response in ways that are not easily anticipated. Based on current staffing, additional AW staff should be identified to support communication activities during emergency activations. These staff members would be participants in ICS training activities.

These exercises will train Austin Water Public Information staff and additional employees with public communication aptitudes who can step in and assist AW PIO during emergencies of longer durations. These trainings will also help ensure that Incident Commanders and other Section Chiefs assigned under the ICS understand what is required for a successful communications response and how top communications staff need to be viewed as decision-makers to avoid mistakes and delays.

In addition, the training will incorporate any changes made to the roles served by the Public Information Division, including staffing of the city's Joint Information Center or new responsibilities, such as internal communications and long-term strategic work. *(A proposed staffing structure with designated roles is included in Appendix B of this report.)*



## Emergency Management Communications (continued)

### Recommendations (continued)

City of Austin staff enthusiastically welcomed the idea of Austin Water PIO staff joining the city's staff in the Joint Information Center. It is a clear pathway for increased cooperation with emergency communications, with all in agreement that having AW staff in the JIC will not only be an asset for any emergency that requires the city's Emergency Operations Center to be activated but build overall communications relationships between the two staffs.

This would also be helpful in implementing our next recommendation, which is based on the stated desires of elected officials to incorporate the use of the city's emergency notification system for critical Austin Water communications. In addition to increasing its use during crises so consumers who are not AW customers gain more information, we propose that AW be enabled to operate Warn Central Texas for a variety of water and wastewater emergencies.

WaterPIO created the first-ever emergency notification system specifically designed for the entire gambit of water and wastewater emergencies, ranging from the smallest of water main breaks to sanitary sewer overflows of more than a million gallons. Enhanced use of emergency notification systems are often the fastest way for the public to see a tangible improvement in a utility's public communications, whether they are utility customers or not. Use of such systems is particularly helpful in areas where a large number of consumers are not utility customers.

Emergency notification system can also be structured to handle internal emergency notifications down to the specific employee. Internal lists can also be used to provide information to elected officials and their staff about area-wide water or wastewater-related issues, as well as the incidents occurring in their districts, reducing the likelihood they will be caught off-guard. All of the messages sent out by the system are tracked and recorded for quality control and transparency.

Austin Water's My ATX Water system was used for the first time as an emergency communication vehicle with a great deal of success and the experience gained during Uri will enable it to be deployed more rapidly. We suggest a Standard Operating Procedure be developed so Austin Water can use My ATX for additional emergency situations. The SOP can also be used to help develop a Standard Operating Procedure for Austin Water's more expanded use of Warn Central Texas for communications with AW consumers who are not customers.



## Emergency Management Communications (continued)

### Recommendations (continued)

WaterPIO also recommends training be conducted concerning the use of the IPAWS emergency alert system. While it is unlikely Austin Water would institute such a notification on its own, its staff should understand how it works and when it is appropriate to use such an alert so IPAWS can be factored into AW's strategic thinking.



# External Communications Approach

## Findings

Austin Water Public Information staff conducted its overall winter weather communication in an appropriate manner and in a similar fashion to earlier years. The approach had served Austin Water well, providing proactive information before typical Austin winter storms or cold snaps, which normally last one to two days.

The historic length and strength of Uri did exactly what a catastrophic weather event will do to any utility; it stretched its systems to and past its breaking points. Many of the challenges faced by PIO staff were unavoidable because of the severity of the storm's power outages.

Austin Water's struggles were mirrored by utilities serving other regions of Texas. Several Austin Water staff members, as well as others from outside the organization, noted how difficult it was for local governments and other water utilities to get into an external communication rhythm.

Multiple information gaps were created because of Uri's impact on the reliability of Austin Water's system data. As mentioned earlier, when AW finally felt confident enough to put out definitive communications during the height of the storm, the information relayed was already 12 to 18 hours behind what was actually occurring in its systems. Those definitive communications quickly became incorrect, which led to reversals of previously reported information that damaged AW's credibility with its customers, as well as the elected officials and community leaders who were assisting AW by repeating its public communications.

For example, when AW tried to tamp down misinformation about additional areas being subject to its initial Boil Water Advisory for the Southwest Zone, it did so in a way that left little wiggle for the possibility that a systemwide Boil Water Advisory might be necessary. When a systemwide Boil Water Advisory was required a few hours later, AW - and elected officials - were exposed to questions that they were attempting to deceive the public.

Austin Water chose to prioritize its operational objectives - finding and fixing the problems within its systems - over public communications. This type of "operational approach" to communication holds onto public information longer, releasing it only when it was completely confirmed by operations personnel. As a result, utilities using this approach tend to have a slower release of helpful information to customers, elected officials, the news media, and employees.



## External Communications Approach (continued)

### Findings (continued)

During Uri, the problem for Austin Water was that its data could not be 100% confirmed and, by the time decision-makers felt comfortable releasing the information using the "operational approach," the facts had already changed, making the information unknowingly dated and incorrect.

As pointed out by elected officials, "clause" or "caveat" messages were not used to help speed up updates to the press and the public. The public does understand that, during historic emergencies, news can change by the hour. Where their frustration kicks in is when the utility does not communicate with them as they have come to expect from other public institutions.

This is not to say that using an "operational approach" to communications is a mistake in all emergencies. It is understandable for utilities to take such an approach when its systems are strained to breaking points because it puts a priority on fixing problems. However, an overemphasis on the operational approach creates information gaps with several internal and external audiences that can cause confusion and create anger. This happened with Austin Water. The narrowing of internal and external communication left the utility open to criticism that it lacked care for its customers and the key stakeholders attempting to help AW, as well as its employees, who felt their fulfillment of their duties was hampered by a lack of regular information.

A prevailing view of the Public Information Division as "marketing staff" instead of public communication experts created blindspots and laid the groundwork for errors to be made. During emergencies, PIO staff and other media-trained personnel should be the ones responding to media requests. Incident Commanders were used as spokespeople for AW's response; they should not be used, given their need to focus on other duties. Austin Water's Director, who was also not an Incident Commander, did serve as particularly effective spokesperson during the press conferences that occurred during the storm.

After the storm passed, customers and consumers clamored for assistance with their internal plumbing failures. This is where the operational approach to communications also harmed Austin Water's standing with the public. Operationally, once AW restored water to the meter, some within AW considered the main work of the utility to be completed. After all, the responsibility for the delivery of the water on the other side of the meter is the property owner's responsibility.



## External Communications Approach (continued)

### Findings (continued)

Customers and consumers, however, did not consider Austin Water's work to be finished. Since they still could not get water out of their taps or into their toilets, they did not view their service as being returned. Some activists targeted AW for showing a lack of care about the people it served.

Fortunately, AW quickly reversed this initial stance and worked to provide water to customers and consumers, as well as assistance to people dealing with interior plumbing failures. It also quickly developed assistance programs for those financially impacted. These efforts have been communicated well by AW PIO staff.

Finally, when it comes to the pre-winter and pre-storm communications put out by Austin Water and how it impacted the issue of private-side plumbing failures, we found the pre-winter level of outreach, and messages used, going into the winter were appropriate, given past winters.

As mentioned, historic storms like Uri will find every conceivable crack in a utility's emergency communications. The most visible example involved the "drip your faucets" messaging before and during Uri. In the middle of the storm, AW had to reverse its advice to customers and consumers about dripping their faucets because of the magnitude of private-side plumbing failures.

While this harmed AW's credibility during the storm, however, we do not see where AW could have prevented the reversal from taking place. Hindsight here is extremely 20/20. AW used the same messages hundreds of other utilities in and out of Texas have stated, especially utilities that experience similar winters.

The "drip your pipes" advice only turned out to be "wrong" because of the prolonged power loss. In fact, many of the other "Protect Your Pipes" messages that did not involve dripping pipes - opening cabinets to let heat circulate around the pipes, use towels with warm water, and the use of hairdryers - also failed because they require power to work. During our interviews with other utilities, some indicated that they will continue to use "drip your pipes" messaging for future storms.



## External Communications Approach (continued)

### Recommendations

It is recommended that Austin Water move away from an operational approach to communications where the press and public, key stakeholders, and employees are informed of the facts only when they are believed to be 100% certain. This approach puts AW in a position to fail during a crisis. Even if the operational response is perfect, if public communications are viewed as slow and guarded, the operation response can be made to look like a failure.

In this case, the desire to hold onto information until it was 100% confirmed did not work because of the 12 to 18-hour gap in information between what was known about the system and what was actually taking place. This resulted in honest, but incorrect, communication about the likelihood of boil water advisories beyond the Southwest Zone. This led to damage to AW's credibility right when it needed it most, especially with elected officials and the media.

Austin Water's Public Information staff need to be empowered to take the appropriate, stronger role in directing not only the messaging decisions, but the establishment of a regular schedule of updates both internally and externally.

Conducting public communication matters in this way improve accuracy, increase speed, and protect AW against misinformation. This does not mean that AW should just throw out facts quickly and let the public decide what's important. Perspective needs to be provided, and it is clear that AW PIO staff that can handle such a balancing act.

To switch to a public information approach to communication, we recommend the Public Information Officer be treated as it normally would be under the Incident Command System, with direct responsibility over AW 's overall internal and external communications. The Public Information Officer is a direct report to the Incident Commanders, just as Section Chiefs are, and have the same level of input over their area of expertise as the Section Chiefs. In addition, other PIO staff members - for example, those responsible for internal communications - should be able to sit in on Section Chief-level meetings to influence strategies and speed up staff notifications.

This will also address Austin Water's difficulty getting into a communications "rhythm," which was stated as an issue by several people. After dealing with the initial shock of the incident or event, a primary goal with every crisis communications response is to get the press, key stakeholders, and the public on a set schedule for informational updates as quickly as possible. This not only makes their lives easier by giving them a set schedule for news that they can count on, it also reduces the chances for misinformation to fill in gaps and influence the public communications process.



## External Communications Approach (continued)

### Recommendations (continued)

This not only helps Austin Water, but it also helps everyone else. Members of the media are particularly thankful for the added ability to plan their days. They are juggling a lot of information and responsibilities at the same time AW is. If AW can provide them with regular updates that provide the information they need to know so they can move on to other matters, they will appreciate the transparency and assistance, which lends itself to more favorable coverage, even when the information provided is challenging for the utility.

This approach uses what we call "planned transparency" and Austin Water should schedule its information updates in line with the news day. If AW provides updates prior to the morning, noon, evening, and late-night newscasts, the media will be less likely to make mistakes.

These updates are NOT given via live press conferences, where a sense of chaos can infect the process. Instead, updated information is released to the press and the public via all available media vehicles, including social media, to try and make sure that everyone gets the latest news. PIO Division staff and the Director would then conduct the one-on-one interviews with anyone who asks for one to show Austin Water is willing to answer any and all questions. Austin Water's PIO staff has the ability to implement this approach, which would include the use of social media streams.

Incident Commanders should not be made available to the media; the Director or other approved PIO staff should handle all contact with the press. With Incident Commanders not being used for media interviews or other public communications, they can continue need to focus on the operational response and not be thrown into situations where they could be caught off-guard in a headline-making manner, harming the credibility of the entire operational response.

WaterPIO suggests Austin Water staff who could be enlisted to represent AW with the press or large gathering with the public, either online or in person, during an emergency receive media training. Media trainers teach employees how to handle public communications through instruction and scenarios that test their skills in order to build important confidence. At the end of the session/sessions, the trainees leave with greater confidence, knowing they are better prepared for the next crisis that may occur.



## External Communications Approach (continued)

### Recommendations (continued)

We recommend that AW should adjust its messaging to incorporate a variety of "winter weather preparations," moving the lead recommendation to drip faucets to an equal level with other actions. This acknowledges what occurred during Uri while maintaining that the "dripping" message still holds value.

This change also acknowledges that the public is less likely to listen to Austin Water's winter preparations if the dripping of faucets remains its primary message. The public will view any lack of change in messaging as AW's unwillingness to learn from what happened.

When it comes to its press and public outreach prior to next winter and ahead of future storms, it is recommended that Austin Water go beyond its previous level of outreach to detail what it learned during Uri. The effort would assure AW's external stakeholders the utility had reviewed what occurred during Uri so it could improve its emergency preparations and responses. It would also relay the latest "winter weather preparation" messages so customers and consumers can better prepare themselves for future events.

Austin Water's PIO staff currently uses communication tactics that have proven successful, including mass media, community, and social media outreach. We recommend that the revised winter weather messaging be shared via press releases, social media posts, brochures/bill stuffers, web content, bill messages, and short videos. Austin Water will want to create one or more videos for its newly-adjusted winter weather tips and it may wish to consider creating a video showing customers and consumers how to turn off their water at the shut-off valve, either at the meter or in a customer's home.

While not ideal if the shut-off is at the meter - normally, utilities do not want their customers working inside their meter boxes - Austin Water needs to provide its customers with information that enables them to stop their water from causing significant damage if their plumbing fails.

While Austin Water is excellent when it comes to providing communications in several languages, we will simply note that it should also ensure that this winter prep outreach is conducted using multiple languages.

Austin Water's first-time use of My ATX Water during a crisis was exemplary, as shown with its extremely positive feedback. AW has stated that My ATX Water will be used during future emergencies.



## External Communications Approach (continued)

### Recommendations (continued)

It is recommended that Austin Water increase its use of the Warn Central Texas emergency notification system to cover all water, wastewater, and employee safety-related emergencies, with the approval of city's public communications staff. The goal is for AW to be able to use the system with greater autonomy.

Only authorized AW staff would be provided with a complete Standard Operating Procedure to be approved by the city.



# Focus: External Communications Before the Storm

## Findings

Based on the information available to Austin Water, including local weather forecasts before Uri arrived, there was little to indicate how historic the event would be, and certainly no way of knowing it would lead to widespread power outages that would hamper AW's response for days.

Austin Water's PIO staff carried out "pre-storm preparation" outreach well before the storm hit, and all of the messaging used was timely and appropriate. *A complete rundown of AW's public communications before, during, and after the storm can be found in Appendix A.*

Some of the issues experienced by customers and consumers, and their frustration with Austin Water after their private plumbing failed, actually confirm that AW got its message out about dripping faucets during freezing temperatures. As discussed earlier, the "drip your faucets" messaging was correct to use, however, it was revealed to be questionable guidance as the storm's impacts worsened. Again, hindsight here is 20/20 and the only reason why AW had to reverse itself on its "drip your faucets" message is because the prolonged power outages caused an exponential number of private plumbing failures.

Conversations with Texas utilities showed a mixed bag of approaches. Utilities to the south of Austin used almost the exact same "drip your faucets" messaging. They did not experience the same number of private side failures and did not have to reverse itself during the storm. They will continue to lead with "drip your faucets" messages in the future.

Conversations with utilities to the north of Austin revealed that they had already experienced a Uri-level winter weather event in the 1980s that caused private side plumbing to fail throughout its service area. As a result, the utilities had already changed their messaging and did not use "drip your faucets" messaging as a leading step for customers to take. In fact, the message is rarely highlighted by their staffs, even though it remained on their list of options.



# Focus: External Communications Before the Storm

## Recommendations

During our work on this review, WaterPIO recommended that Austin Water's Public Information staff add to its current "Winter Weather Preparation" communications with additional pre-winter outreach to external audiences, including customers, consumers, the media, community leaders and elected officials. Educational materials detailing the adjusted "winter weather" messages should be produced and distributed to these audiences, made available online, and possibly mailed to all customers.

In addition to the changes in the "Protect Your Pipes" messages, WaterPIO recommends the pre-winter messages be adjusted to acknowledge the possibility for another Uri to take place and detail Austin Water's actions to improve since the storm. The messages would also focus on the preparation information that has changed from Winter 2020-2021 to Winter 2021-2022.

We also recommend a pre-winter media event, held at a service yard, that showcases what Austin Water has learned and details what customers and consumers need to know ahead of the next winter. The highlight - and media grabber - for the events would be a demonstration showing how a water main is repaired. When used in other locations, it's proven to be a can't-miss event with great video and sound for the assembled press and social media influencers. Along with the demo would be visually pleasing, easy-to-shoot signage that lays out all of AW's positive actions and its adjusted winter prep messages.



# Focus: External Communications During the Storm

## Findings

As previously mentioned, a gap was created between what was actually occurring in Austin Water's systems and what Operations staff believed to be correct. Based on our interviews, it appears the length of the gap was approximately 12 to 18 hours.

The information released by AW mirrored what was known, and it resulted in two key "switchbacks," where AW had to reverse the messaging it had previously used. These two changes involved the dripping of faucets to prevent frozen pipes and the statements designed to address misinformation about boil water advisories.

Advice to drip faucets to prevent pipes from freezing changed within hours to pleas to stop dripping faucets, even though the pipes were still freezing. Meanwhile, messaging that a Boil Water Advisory issued from one zone of the system did not impact other sections was closely followed by the issuance of a citywide Boil Water Advisory.

These message reversals hurt AW's credibility; an impression was created that AW did not know what was going on with its systems. Elected officials have stated they felt "hung out to dry" by the reversals because they happened so shortly after they had repeated AW's communications.

It must be clearly stated that the initial messages were correct at the time they were issued; no falsehoods were stated to any customer, consumer, or key stakeholder at any time. It simply turned out that the water system's status was changing in a rapid, unforeseen manner that made the public communication incorrect shortly after it was released.

Regarding the handling of the misinformation appearing online following the issuance of the Boil Water Advisory for the Southwest Zone, Austin Water took strong action to tamp down questions that other boil water advisories had been issued for other parts of AW's system.

The language used, however, was too definitive, in that it did not give AW more leeway to adjust its messaging if or when, and it was when, another boil



# Focus: External Communications During the Storm

## Recommendations

water advisory would need to be issued. This also created a situation where elected officials who were working to help AW tamp down misinformation by repeating AW's messages were left having to explain quick reversals about their own statements to their constituents.

Many of our recommendations here are mirrored previous sections, and the greatest issue hindering external communications mid-storm was the aforementioned 12 to 18-hour system information gap. This is where the Public Information Officer and PIO Division staff's level of involvement in an oversight and decision-making role would've been helpful to the response.

Messaging was focused on providing operational updates - what Austin Water wanted the public to know - instead of responding to public fears and concerns - what the public felt it needed to know. To avoid making these same mistakes again, the Public Information Officer must be a leader in the emergency response moving forward, not viewed as "the head of marketing".

A more customer-centric approach that uses more "clause" language, as one elected official put it, actually enables communications to be faster and express much-needed empathy during a crisis. Teaming a "circumstances could change" messaging approach with regular, news window-friendly updates is the best way to get the information the public is clamoring for out as quickly as possible with a tone that respects what they are going through during the crisis.

One example of "clause messaging" that could be used for future boil water advisories is as follows: "A boil water advisory for only the Southwest Zone has been issued. *(Followed by details about boiling water.)* At this time, no other boil water advisories have been issued. We are monitoring our systems closely and the continued impacts of the storm may require boil water advisories for additional zones or the city as whole. We will keep the public regularly updated about our system's status and if an additional boil water advisory is issued, Austin Water will be the first to report it to the community through all of our public information streams, including immediate contact with the news media."



# Focus: Critical Customers

## Findings & Recommendations

Communicating with critical customers is a significant area of concern during emergencies because a utility's entire operational crisis response can be called in question and even viewed as a failure if its communications with critical customers fail.

Why? Because if a critical customer feels it is not being communicated with and is left to seek out essential information on their own, their first call or email will usually be to the news media. Once the news media is led to believe, correctly or incorrectly, that a utility is failing to communicate with customers who rely on their water for the public's health and welfare, then the resulting, almost certain negative press coverage will throw wrenches into the utility's entire emergency response. Valuable time and resources will need to be spent to address the public anger and frustration, which will be expressed online and with elected officials, who will then put their own pressure on the utility.

This did not happen with Austin Water; AW did very well when it came to communicating with its current critical customers: hospitals, other healthcare providers like dialysis centers, and wholesale customers. There is no need for AW to change its approach with current critical customers.

We have chosen to focus on this area because AW's high level of performance with its critical customers creates opportunities to improve in other areas. Expanding AW's current definition of what a "critical customer" is could help it proactively improve its communications in an area where it and other utilities have the most difficulties, and where elected officials have stated they want to see the most improvement: non-customer consumers of AW's services, most notably apartment renters.

If Austin Water were to add major apartment complexes to its list of critical customers, it would elevate the importance of communicating with these communities. *WaterPIO typically uses 100 or more units to define "major"; this number could be based on input from elected officials.* Major employers and community service providers, which serve as news sources for their constituencies, should also be considered.

One way to add in these communities without adding greater difficulty for staff is to apply an expanded use of the city's emergency notification system. Lists of contacts can be incorporated into most systems without difficulty.



# Focus: Consumers & Renters

## Findings

Based on WaterPIO's experience and the conversations held with other Texas water utilities, non-customer consumers and renters living in a utility's service area are the most difficult to reach with public communications. Direct-to-customer approaches do not work - including bill-delivered messages, flyers, and brochures, and My ATX Water messages - because consumers and renters don't have their own Austin Water accounts.

They also don't have an automatic reason to go to the AW website, where public information is plentiful, or have any reason to spend time paying attention to the utility on social media, even if it is doing something considered controversial by others, like proposing to raise rates. After all, these consumers don't get a bill and rate increase impacts are almost always pooled together with other rent adjustments.

Without direct customer connections, utilities like Austin Water are left to rely on third parties like property management companies and their staffs, and the use of mass and social media during an emergency. With property managers, the press, and social media, there's less certainty that the consumers will get the messages utilities want to get across. With social media, posts and comments from others tacked onto the utilities' messages can cause harmful confusion.

The number of private side plumbing failures was an extremely rare situation for Austin Water to deal with. Utilities that suffer thousands of water main breaks a year due to freezing temperatures do not experience anywhere near the amount of in-home failures that occurred during Uri, which prevented the consumers from having service returned to their taps after AW had restored it to their meters.

Public anger was focused on Austin Water toward the end of the storm and as the area's recovery began to take shape. AW's operational approach to communications led to an initial belief among customers and consumers that it was proclaiming its work was done after it returned water service to the meter, which is where AW's responsibility to ensure the delivery of service does end.

During previous emergencies, it was also not in AW's operational response to supply water to customers and consumers experiencing private side breaks.



## Focus: Consumers & Renters

### Findings (continued)

Fortunately, Austin Water quickly adjusted its response to help customers and consumers receive drinking water at water stations. While the criticism focusing on the "AW got it to the meter" had some merit, much of it was hyperbolic and parties actually made statements that took credit for AW's actions.

AW's actions after Uri to help all customers and consumers recover through a variety of helpful efforts, including bill relief and plumbing repair assistance, have helped it correct the initial criticism. All of AW's efforts to provide drinking water during the recovery, and then to make bill relief and plumbing assistance available, have been well communicated to the press and the public.



# Focus: Consumers & Renters

## Recommendations

Based on WaterPIO's past experience, conversations with other Texas water utilities and WaterPIO clients, and interviews with Austin Water staff, it is difficult to guarantee non-customer consumers of a water utility's services will take in information about its status or actions, even during an emergency. However, this does not mean the goal is not achievable. There are ways to attempt to move the needle as much as possible, and those attempts are rooted in grassroots outreach to these consumers.

Successful grassroots approaches carried out by water utilities have included:

- *Property management (PM) company and manager outreach.* Meetings with representatives of national, regional, and local companies should be held, along with sit-downs with managers on site. During the sessions, AW's communications plan would be explained, with an emphasis on how AW would not place an undue burden on PM resources. Public information materials would be provided for distribution by the property managers; the printing to be done by AW. All the PMs have to do is distribute the information. One of the public education pieces would address non-customer consumers, instructing them how to inform themselves about AW's efforts. AW will ask PMs to provide AW's materials to all new renters.

AW should add the property management companies and managers to its critical customer lists to ensure they have the latest information to provide to their renters. Property managers would be encouraged to ask their renters to sign up for Warn Central Texas alerts and notifications.

- *Enhanced use of social media.* Austin Water social media will make more of a concerted effort to reach out to consumers during non-crisis times by identifying apartment complex Facebook and NextDoor online communities and offering to work with them on public information. Whenever AW has a significant effort impacting all of its consumers in an area or areas, AW Public Information staff will add additional efforts to reach the renters within the community or communities.

*AW PIO staff has already recognized this area of improvement and is taking steps to ensure that consumer and rental communities are targeted ahead of the next winter.*



## Focus: Consumers & Renters

### Recommendations (continued)

- *Improved coordination with elected officials and community leaders.* Austin Water should improve its outreach to elected officials and their staffs, community leaders and their teams, and renter associations (not property managers, but renter-run organizations) in much the same way it would work with property management companies.
- *Community meetings.* Austin Water should host community meetings at the apartment complexes or in a central location for multiple complexes. These public information sessions would include presentations and stations detailing specific Austin Water efforts - as well as its winter weather information - and should go a long way toward building a connection between AW and the rental community. Everyone in attendance gains a personal experience with AW and will be more likely (through encouragement during the meeting) to use its website and social media for crisis information, as well as to sign up for emergency alerts.

By using this combination of grassroots approaches, Austin Water can help address the current gaps expressed during the oversight and community listening sessions.



# Focus: Austin Water Website & Outage Map

## Findings

Austin Water's website is a section of the City of Austin's website and several interviewees expressed issues with the site's usability. The city's platform experienced performance issues due to power outages impacting its servers. Spikes in web traffic may have also contributed but power loss was relayed as being the main reason for the issue with the city's platform and its operation of AW's website.

Austin Water's PIO staff posted "Winter Weather Tips" prior to the storm's arrival and consistently updated the website throughout the storm. Before Uri, AW did not maintain an outage map. This may have been seen as a surprise to the press and the public, However, given AW's low annual number of water main breaks and their usual containment to small areas where door-to-door notification is possible, it is understandable that its resources wouldn't be applied to creating and maintaining a full-time outage map.

This is the rule, and not the exception, with water utilities across the country. As Austin Water experienced during Uri, however, when a major emergency occurs, the public is conditioned - because of the energy industry's longtime use of outage maps - to expect to find an outage map online. Because AW couldn't initially provide that information, it suffered in comparison to Austin Energy's outage map.

Austin Water staff did a tremendous job to create an outage map mid-storm. WaterPIO has a unique level of experience with such an effort. During one of our former employers' first-ever boil water advisories, staff also created its first-ever outage map. The struggles experienced by Austin Water - website limitations and slow-at-times updates - were also experienced by WaterPIO's former employer. However, as both utilities discovered, the work paid off with greater customer information during emergencies. It is also clear that Austin Water's outage map will be even better whenever it is called upon during a major emergency. The work done by AW IT staff during Uri will pay dividends well into the future. Their work should be commended.

Austin Water staff did relay issues with the IT work process and other internal communications under AW's Incident Command Structure (ICS). Some stated they were working on similar projects as other staff without knowing it and that their project assignments would change with each Incident Command shift.



# Focus: Austin Water Website & Outage Map

## Recommendations

Austin Water's use of its website during the storm was exemplary and it served as a valuable one-stop-shop for information, which is the goal during a crisis. For the future, it is recommended that winter weather prep information receive even higher visibility placement and that its existence is highlighted throughout all of AW's messaging. (AW PIO staff understood this before our discussions took place.)

While it is already doing so, we will recommend that Austin Water continue to devote time and resources to the development of its outage map in advance of next winter. This effort would be highlighted by AW's PIO staff; the map will serve as a visual example of AW's actions to improve its service to its customers and consumers following Uri.

IT's issue with assignments shifting or unnecessarily overlapping can be resolved as Austin Water reviews its Incident Command Structure. The staff needs a clear owner who can properly inform Incident Commanders about what is being worked on and how that work needs to carry through more than one shift to be successful. This will lessen the possibility of wasted employee effort.

It was suggested during the interviews that AW PIO staff be placed in charge of IT efforts with public-facing components like the outage map. We are not sure if that is the proper path, given IT's need to serve a variety of divisions during crises.

However, we do suggest that one AW staffer be given the responsibility to help manage the assignments and make sure ICs understand how and why projects are being worked on so that valuable staffing resources are not duplicated or wasted.



# Focus: Social Media

## Findings & Recommendations

Austin Water's use of social media throughout all of the stages of the storm - before, during, and after Uri - was technically spot-on. Information was clearly and frequently relayed at nearly every possible stage. However, as mentioned earlier, the tone and exact information relayed in the social media caused issues.

As discussed earlier, a couple of the messages used put Austin Water and its stakeholders who were assisting the utility with public information in difficult positions after they had to be reversed. Again, this information was correct when it was sent out. The reversals are tied to the 12 to 18-hour gap in information from AW's systems and AW's use of an operational-based communications approach.

We will discuss this finding in the Internal Communications section of this review but make mention of it here. Austin Water employees were told to rely on AW's social media streams and mass media for information about the utility's emergency response. This frustrated and angered employees. They did not take issue with how the social media work was conducted, just that they had to rely on it as a primary source of information about their own employer's actions.

As mentioned earlier in this review, WaterPIO recommends changes to the Incident Command Structure that provide Austin Water's PIO staff with greater ownership and oversight over external communications. This will enable greater speed with its social media work and more consideration for its tone. These two improvements will also help AW handle misinformation with greater consistency. While Austin Water does well with its social media, it should consider updating its social media policy to incorporate changes based on post-Uri improvements.

Social media is a helpful tool in a crisis for internal communications so employees know what the utility is saying to its customers, but it should not be relied on as the main source of information for the employees. Employees felt "disrespected," especially those needing information from Austin Water's leadership to assist with their work.



# Focus: Internal Communications Approach

## Findings

As stated in earlier sections of this review, Austin Water's operational approach to communications influenced its internal communications to its staff. Viewing the PIO Division as "marketers" and not true internal communication professionals added to the diminished importance of the internal communications within the response.

Multiple members of AW staff felt management tightened "need-to-know" circles of employees and adopted an approach that "released information when it's thought to be completely safe." This kept AW employees from being provided with all of the information they needed to completely fulfill their duties.

They were also the AW staff most affected by the reversals in the "drip your faucets" and "boil water advisory" messages, yet they had to find out about those changes at the same time as the general public. These comments mirrored those from elected officials and other community communication partners.

As a result, morale was damaged in the middle of the crisis and many employees shifted to using their own relationships with other AW staff to get the information they needed. Not only did this create a situation where employees were on different pages because they had varying levels of information, but newer employees were also placed at a disadvantage because they did not have similar organizational connections to supply them with key details.

Covid also contributed to the feeling of disconnection among personnel. Under normal situations, employees would have had the ability to physically come together and address the operational approach to internal communications. It is much easier to get complaints acted on when employees are in the same rooms together.

Austin Water did do the best it could to bring its separated staff together by using Microsoft Teams. Multiple employees noted that, given the storm's impacts on remotely-operating staff, AW's use of Teams was one of the best ways to handle group communications when employees could get online. However, several of those interviewed also noted how they felt they were bouncing around from one Teams meeting to another Teams meeting in order to get their work completed.



# Focus: Internal Communications Approach

## Recommendations

An internal communications approach that emphasizes frequent updates, concern for employee safety, and understanding of the incident is critical to an effective emergency response. It enables utility staff to fulfill their duties with greater efficiency, enhanced confidence, and fewer mistakes. It also creates a higher level of confidence within the organization when it comes to its external communications.

To achieve these goals, it is recommended that Austin Water change its approach to internal communication. We again recommend that AW's top PIO staff be elevated to decision-making roles that enable them to influence internal communication strategies as part of the overall communications response. We also recommend that AW PIO create a specific role within its team assigned to keep AW's staff informed of the latest information that they need to do their jobs.

The addition of a PIO staffer to oversee internal communication will help prevent the situation where information became a privilege of position and experience. The internal communications provided by the Public Information Officer and the PIO staff would be released to all staff and repeated by each Section Chief to their division teams.

The information provided to Austin Water employees will mirror the information provided during the improved schedule of updates to the public that mirror the news day. This will ensure that employees are consistently informed through the emergency, no matter what shift they are on. Division-specific internal communications are still to be carried out by the Section Chiefs and their staffs.

One might think that this doesn't vary much from telling employees to watch the news media or social media for essential information. There are several important differences. First, the employee is treated as a valued member of staff, given information directly by its own leadership. Second, staff does not have to go searching for the information online or by contacting another staffer. Third, staff are not left in a position where a customer may know more than they do, and lastly, the news media may not relay AW information correctly. Because of a lack of trust in the press, your employees may ask questions up the chain of command to check the information's veracity. This makes for a slower, inefficient process.

Finally, Austin Water should enlist Warn Central Texas to help handle internal notifications. Most systems can use simple email and text lists to efficiently inform all employees or specific teams.



# Focus: External Communications After the Storm

## Recommendations

WaterPIO's interviews with Austin Water staff were greatly beneficial when it came to making recommendations about the tools, tactics, and messages to use to help Austin Water improve its internal and external communications heading into the next winter. WaterPIO has supplied the winter weather preparation messages it has used in the past and with its clients to move away from AW's emphasis on "dripping of faucets" as its top mitigation strategy for private plumbing failures.

Earlier in this review, we strongly suggested enhanced pre-winter external communications, including an event at a service yard with a water main repair demonstration. We have personally used this approach for an employer that suffered more than 2,000 water main breaks in one winter. It changes the news media's view of what the utility has to do to keep people with water during cold weather, and informs customers and consumers how they can help themselves. The demonstration also provides great video for the press and social media.

We suggest Austin Water emphasize the following messages through all of its public communication streams to assure its customers and consumers that it learned from this historic storm and is moving forward with a variety of improvements throughout the organization:

- Remind the public of AW's numerous efforts to assist its customers and consumers following the storm with updates detailing the latest facts and figures concerning the amounts of relief provided.
- Produce printed materials and online web content dedicated to how Austin Water is moving forward after Uri with its customers and consumers in mind.
- Highlight Austin Water's already-in-motion efforts to adjust its Capital Improvements Plan to address the issues uncovered during Uri. AW has admirably adjusted its plans to tackle these uncovered concerns as quickly as possible. The public should be fully informed about these targeted efforts.
- Promote Austin Water's efforts to expand its overall communications to the non-customer consumers, as well as its efforts to improve its emergency communication efforts with these communities by enlisting their help. If AW can quickly make connections with apartment complexes and their property management teams, and gain coverage for those efforts, that can lead other apartment complexes taking part.



# Recap of Top Recommendations

## *AW's Public Information Division*

Austin Water's Public Information Division should complete National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) training.

## *Emergency Management Communications*

Austin Water's Public Information Division should identify staff to serve multiple shifts during emergency activations.

Austin Water's emergency management structure should elevate the communications role to a full Public Information Officer position with decision-making authority to help ensure that communications responses are not heavily focused on operational concerns. The Public Information Officer should be viewed as a top decision-maker during the emergency response.

Austin Water should conduct emergency response plan-related exercises that incorporate the ICS structure and use public communication injects to test the communications area of the response in ways that are not easily anticipated.

Austin Water PIO should provide staff at the City of Austin's Joint Information Center during emergency operations to help close information gaps and coordinate communications.

Austin Water PIO should dedicate staff members to internal communications and long-term strategic work during emergency operations. An increase in PIO staffing is necessary to fully support emergency communications. In addition, Austin Water should identify additional AW staff who can support PIO activities.

The Warn Central Texas Notification System should be incorporated into Austin Water's communications operations, including use during all water, wastewater, and employee safety-related emergencies, with the approval of City of Austin communications staff. Austin Water should develop standard operating procedures for use of the emergency notification system.

Austin Water should complete training concerning the use of the Department of Homeland Security's Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS) emergency alert system. While it is unlikely Austin Water would institute such a notification on its own, its staff should understand how it works and when it is appropriate to use such an alert so IPAWS can be factored into AW's strategic thinking.



# Recap of Top Recommendations

## *External Communications Approach*

Austin Water should move away from an approach that prioritizes its operational objectives - finding and fixing the problems within its systems - over public communications. This type of "operational approach" to communication holds onto public information longer, releasing it only when it was completely confirmed by operations personnel. As a result, utilities using this approach tend to have a slower release of helpful information to customers, elected officials, the news media, and employees.

We recommend that the Public Information Officer have direct responsibility over AW's overall internal and external communications. In addition, other PIO staff responsible for internal and external communications should participate in Section Chief-level meetings to influence and speed up communication responses. A more customer-centric approach should enable communications to be faster and express much needed empathy during a crisis.

Austin Water should adopt a "planned transparency" approach to releasing updates to the press and the public via all available media vehicles-including social media. Austin Water PIO should set a schedule for updates that coincides with local news deadlines. Communications staff and the Director, rather than Incident Commanders, would conduct media interviews to show Austin Water is willing to answer any and all questions. Messaging should provide caveats regarding information that is not fully known so a frequent release of information to the public can take place.

Austin Water PIO should take a stronger role in setting a schedule for updates during an emergency, drafting language and strongly advocating for timely release of updates to customers. Even though there may be institutional resistance to proactive communication of this kind, AW PIO must provide this leadership and not allow communications to get bogged down in the review process or sidelined as operational analysis and objectives are prioritized.

WaterPIO suggests that Austin Water staff who could be enlisted to represent AW in media interviews, press conferences, public meetings, or similar roles during an emergency receive media training.

Austin Water should adjust its winter weather messaging to incorporate a variety of winter weather preparations tips for customers, based on lessons learned from Winter Storm Uri.

Austin Water should increase its use of the My ATX Water Customer Portal during future emergencies.



# Recap of Top Recommendations

## ***Focus: External Communications***

Austin Water should enhance its level of outreach prior to Winter 2021-2022 to publicly demonstrate what it has learned from Winter Storm Uri. The enhanced effort would assure AW's external stakeholders that the utility reviewed what occurred during Uri to improve its emergency preparations and responses. The enhanced communications should include a dedicated webpage and additional pre-winter outreach to external audiences, including customers, consumers, the media, community leaders and elected officials.

Austin Water should host a pre-winter media event, to showcase what was learned and details what customers and consumers need to know ahead of the next winter.

## ***Focus: Critical Customers***

Austin Water should consider adding major apartment complexes to its list of critical customers. Doing so will elevate these communities in importance. Major employers and community service providers, which serve as news sources for their constituencies, should also be considered.

Expanded use of the Warn Central Texas Notification System could be an effective tool for communicating with renters who are not Austin Water direct customers.

## ***Focus: Consumers and Renters***

Austin Water should mirror grassroots approaches to reach out directly to multifamily property management companies and managers. In addition, Austin Water should add the property management companies and managers to its critical customer lists to ensure they have the latest information to provide to their renters.

Austin Water, through its social media platforms, should make more of a concerted effort to reach out to consumers during non-crisis times and provide details about how customers can improve their levels of interaction with AW.

Austin Water should work with elected officials and their staffs, community leaders and their teams, and tenant associations similar to its work with property management companies.



# Recap of Top Recommendations

Austin Water should consider hosting community meetings at apartment complexes or in a central location for multiple complexes. These public information sessions would include presentations and stations detailing specific Austin Water efforts as well as its winter weather information.

## ***Focus: Austin Water Website and Outage Map***

For the future, it is recommended that winter weather prep information receive even higher visibility placement on the website and that its existence is highlighted throughout all of AW's messaging.

Austin Water should add a real-time outage map to the website during normal operations that can be quickly updated during an emergency.

Austin Water should create clearer reporting structure between IT support and Incident Command Structure to ensure efficiency and expediency.

## ***Focus: Internal Communications Approach***

We recommend that Austin Water shift its approach to share more information with employees during emergency operations and include internal communications as part of overall emergency incident activities and provide updates to staff that follow the news cycle and important public notifications.

We also recommend that AW PIO staff develop internal communications materials during each emergency shift.

An increase in PIO staffing is necessary to fully support communications.

Austin Water should enlist Warn Central Texas to help handle internal notifications.

## ***External Communications After the Storm***

We strongly suggest Austin Water enhance its pre-winter external communications, including an event at a service yard with a water main and/or service line repair demonstration.

Austin Water should emphasize the following messages through all of its public communication streams:



## Recap of Top Recommendations

- Remind the public of AW's numerous efforts to assist its customers and consumers following the storm with updates detailing the latest facts and figures concerning the amounts of relief provided.
- Produce printed materials and online web content dedicated to how Austin Water is moving forward after Uri with its customers and consumers in mind.
- Highlight Austin Water's already-in-motion efforts to adjust its Capital Improvements Plan to address the issues uncovered during Uri. AW has admirably adjusted its plans to tackle these uncovered concerns as quickly as possible. The public should be informed about these targeted efforts.
- Promote Austin Water's efforts to expand its overall communications to the non-customer consumers, as well as its efforts to improve its emergency communication efforts with these communities by enlisting their help. If AW can quickly make connections with apartment complexes and their property management teams, and gain coverage for those efforts, that can lead other apartment complexes taking part.

# Appendix A: Austin Water Winter Storm Communications Overview



WINTER STORM

# COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW

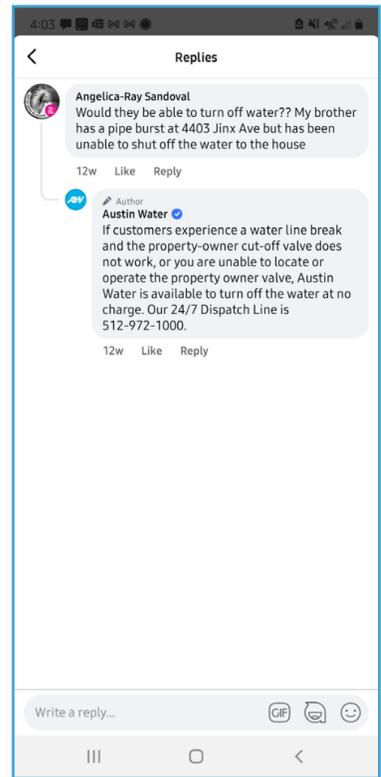
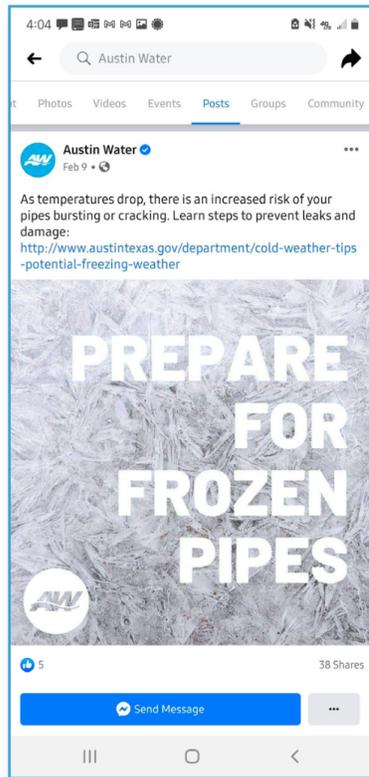
<p><b>FEBRUARY</b> 2021 <b>9</b> <b>TUESDAY</b></p> <p><b>Weather Conditions</b> High / Low <b>64° / 46°</b> <b>Overcast</b></p> 	<p><b>FEBRUARY</b> 2021 <b>10</b> <b>WEDNESDAY</b></p> <p><b>Weather Conditions</b> High / Low <b>45° / 37°</b> <b>Fog</b></p> 	<p><b>FEBRUARY</b> 2021 <b>11</b> <b>THURSDAY</b></p> <p><b>Weather Conditions</b> High / Low <b>36° / 30°</b> <b>Light Freezing Rain</b></p> 
--	--	---

- February 9 promotion of Cold Weather Tips on social media and **Randi Jenkins** provided on-camera interview for KXAN about Austin Water’s cold weather preparations
- February 10 press release about Cold Weather Preparedness

**Social Media**

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

- NextDoor
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram



**Thursday, February 11: Calls Made to Dispatch 120**

FEBRUARY 2021  
**12**  
FRIDAY

**Weather  
Conditions**

High / Low

**32° / 30°**

**Sleet, Wind**



**Operations Status**

Power outages due to storm conditions affect wastewater pump stations.

Staff dispatched to make repairs and set up generators.

**Social Media**

Austin Water  
Public Information Office  
posted frequent updates on

NextDoor

Twitter

Facebook

Instagram

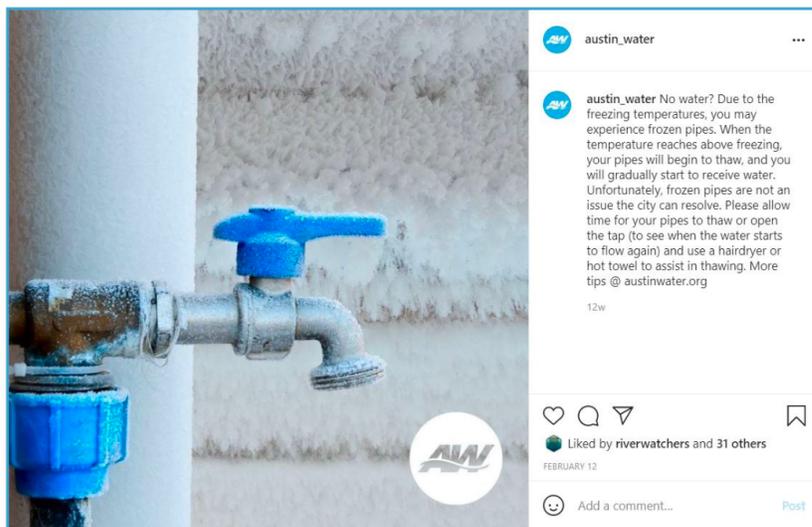
**Communications Message**

Frozen Pipes Preparedness

**Public Notice:**

Texas Plume Lift Station Sanitary Sewer Overflow

**Calls Made to Dispatch 204**



FEBRUARY 2021  
**13**  
SATURDAY

**Weather  
Conditions**

High / Low

**30° / 26°**

Wind



**Operations Status**

Continued efforts to maintain operations at wastewater pump stations.

**Social Media**

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

NextDoor

Twitter

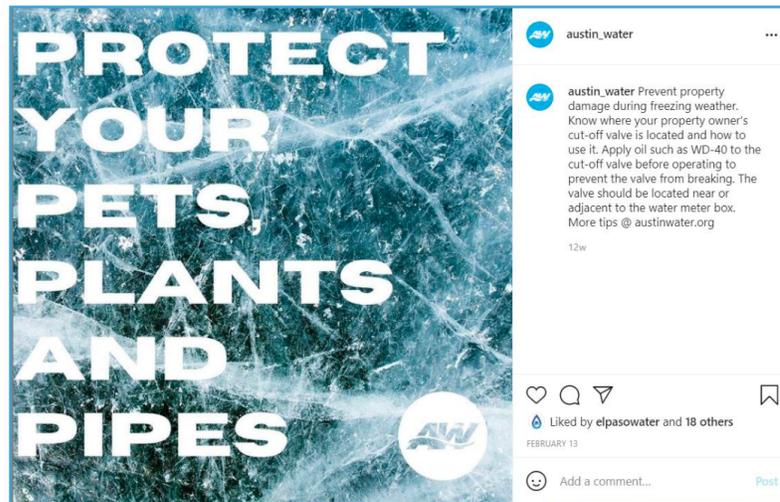
Facebook

Instagram

**Communications Message**

Protect Your Pipes

**Calls Made to Dispatch 231**



FEBRUARY 2021

14

SUNDAY

Weather Conditions

High / Low

30° / 21°

Snow Overnight



Communications Message

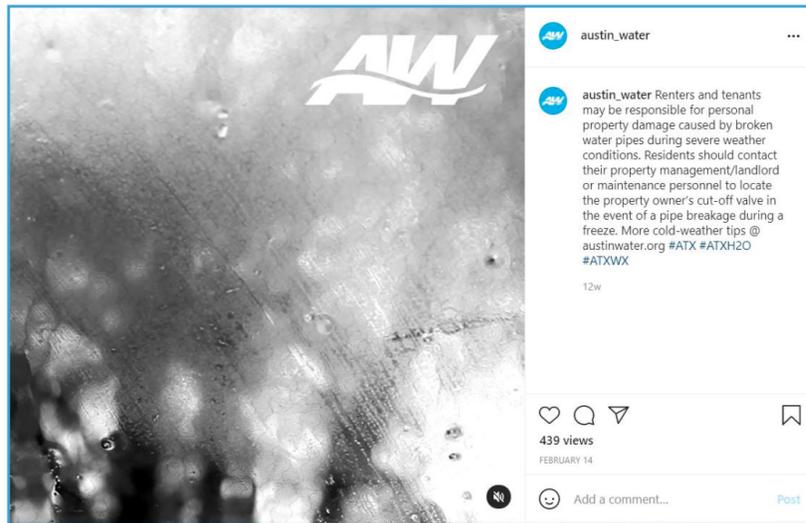
Locate your water shut off valve

Social Media

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

- NextDoor
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram

Calls Made to Dispatch 281



FEBRUARY 2021  
**15**  
MONDAY

### Weather Conditions

High / Low

**25° / 8°**

**Treacherous Road Conditions**



### Operations Status

- ◆ Longhorn Dam operations were required but loss of power necessitated manual operations in icy/snowy conditions.

### Conservation Messaging

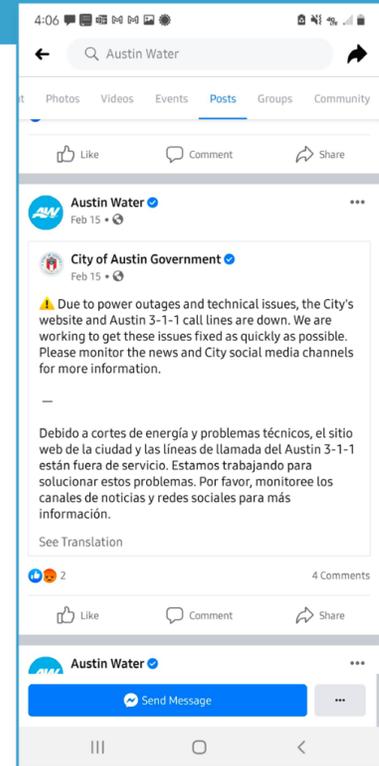
Call for electric and water conservation –  
**Avoid use of large appliances**

### Social Media

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

- NextDoor
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram

### Calls Made to Dispatch 2,161



**FEBRUARY 2021**  
**16**  
**TUESDAY**

**Weather Conditions**

High / Low

**26° / 7°**

**Treacherous Road Conditions**



**Operations Status**

**Late evening:** Dropping pressure and draining reservoirs in SW Austin. Crews respond to check tanks and look for water line breaks. Area of concern expands overnight.

**Conservation Messaging**

Call for electric and water conservation –  
**Avoid use of large appliances**

**Communications Message**

- ◆ Frozen Pipes Instructions
- ◆ No water disruption planned
- ◆ No Boil Water Notice
- ◆ Austin Water has adequate water to serve customers
- ◆ (Evening) Austin Water is aware of low pressure/no water in SW Austin

**Social Media**

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

- 🏠 NextDoor
- 🐦 Twitter
- 📘 Facebook
- 📷 Instagram

**Calls Made to Dispatch 2,851**

**Austin Water** @AustinWater · Feb 16

1. NO hay planes para interrumpir el servicio de agua. 2. Los equipos de despacho de emergencia 512-972-1000 están respondiendo a las interrupciones de la tubería principal de agua y la asistencia al cliente si la válvula de corte del propietario no funciona o usted no puede ubicarla.

4 comments, 3 retweets, 2 likes

**Austin Water** @AustinWater · Feb 16

3. For Austin Water customers, there is NO need to boil your water. Our treatment plants are working well and we have adequate supply.

**Austin Water** @AustinWater · Feb 16

1. There are NO plans to disrupt water service. Our plants are operating normally. 2. Emergency Dispatch Crews (512-972-1000) are responding to water main breaks and customer assistance if the property owner cut-off valve does not work or you are unable to locate it. See image:

Show this thread

24 comments, 69 retweets, 112 likes

**FEBRUARY 2021**  
**17**  
**WEDNESDAY**

**Weather Conditions**

High / Low

**30° / 23°**

Freezing rain, Ice fog



**Operations Status**

**Morning:** Pressures drop below minimum level in SW Austin, requiring Boil Water Notice

**Afternoon/Evening:**

- Water demand soars due to broken pipes and exceptionally high water use
- Power outage at Ullrich Water Treatment Plant
- Widespread low pressure and water outages begin

**Communications Message**

**11 AM Press Release:**  
 Boil Water Notice for SW Austin and Lost Creek; mandatory water conservation

- Virtual News Conference

**8:30 PM Press Release:**  
 Citywide Boil Water Notice

- Warn Central Texas notification in English and Spanish
- Boil Water How-To Video
- Online Service Request Form Launched

**My ATX Water Customer Portal**

Nearly **950,000 emails** and text messages sent

- Text Messages averaged **1,800/minute**
- Emails averaged **675/minute**
- Messages sent to SW and Lost Creek Pressure Zones (**27,277 texts** sent and **29,349 emails** sent)
- Citywide message sent about SW/Lost Creek area impacts (**175,509 texts** sent)

**Conservation Messaging**

- Mandatory Conservation measures initiated when the Boil Water Notice was issued for SW Austin and Lost Creek.

**Online Service Request Form in multiple languages**

**30,000 requests** received over 4 days

**Warn Central Texas (Reverse 9-1-1)**

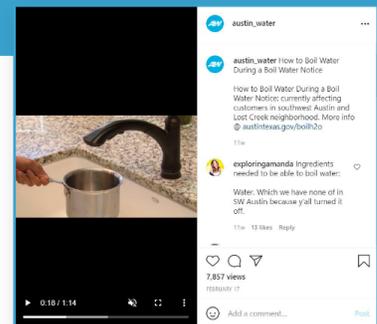
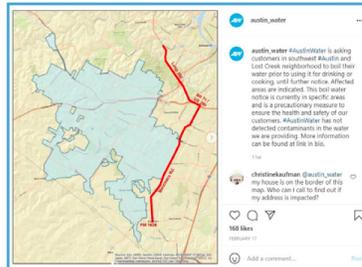
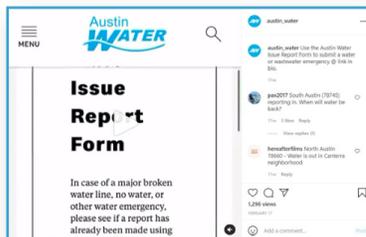
Citywide Notification of Boil Water Notice: **1.1 million contacts**

**Social Media**

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

- NextDoor
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram

**Calls Made to Dispatch 10,800**



**FEBRUARY 2021**  
**18**  
**THURSDAY**

**Weather Conditions**

High / Low

**33° / 28°**

**Light snow,  
Mostly cloudy**



**Operations Status**

- ◆ Water Treatment Plants operating in stable mode
- ◆ Widespread low water pressure and water outages
- ◆ Restored water to three hospitals
- ◆ Began filling storage reservoirs Central Pressure Zone

**Online Service Request Form in multiple languages**

**30,000 requests** received over 4 days

**Communications Message**

- ◆ **Boil Water messaging** in multiple languages (Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic)
- ◆ Virtual News Conference

**Conservation Messaging**

**Conservation messages for all who have water** including requests to limit water use to essential uses, as Austin Water worked to restore water service.

**My ATX Water Customer Portal**

Nearly **950,000 emails** and text messages sent

- ◆ Text Messages averaged **1,800/minute**
- ◆ Emails averaged **675/minute**
- ◆ Citywide Message about Boil Water Notice sent (**175,509 texts** sent)

**Calls Made to Dispatch 712**

**Social Media**

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

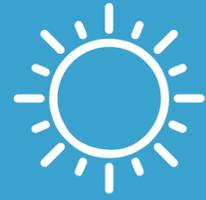
- 📞 NextDoor
- 🐦 Twitter
- 📘 Facebook
- 📷 Instagram



FEBRUARY 2021  
**19**  
 FRIDAY

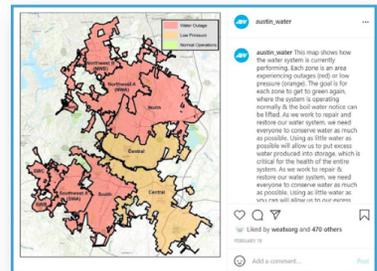
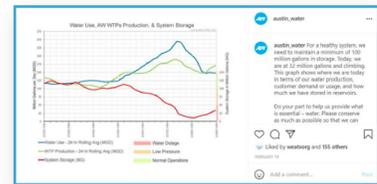
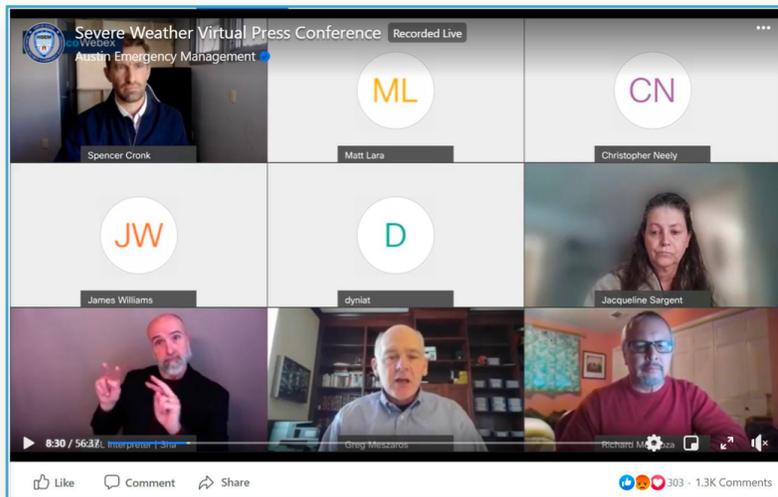
**Weather Conditions**

High / Low  
**42° / 21°**  
 Sunny



<p><b>Operations Status</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plants producing more water than customers are using</li> </ul>	<p><b>Online Service Request Form in multiple languages</b></p> <p><b>30,000 requests</b> received over 4 days</p>	<p><b>E-mail update:</b></p> <p>Sent to customers who submitted service request forms <b>17,848 emails</b> sent</p>
<p><b>Communications Message</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin twice daily operations updates with Pressure Zone Map and Water Use Chart</li> <li>Virtual News Conference</li> <li>Customers could see improvements in water service as early as the end of the weekend.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conservation Messaging</b></p> <p><b>Conservation messages for all who have water</b> including requests to limit water use to essential uses, as Austin Water worked to restore water service.</p>	<p><b>Social Media</b></p> <p>Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NextDoor</li> <li>Twitter</li> <li>Facebook</li> <li>Instagram</li> </ul>

**Calls Made to Dispatch 903**



**FEBRUARY 2021**  
**20**  
**SATURDAY**

**Weather Conditions**

High / Low

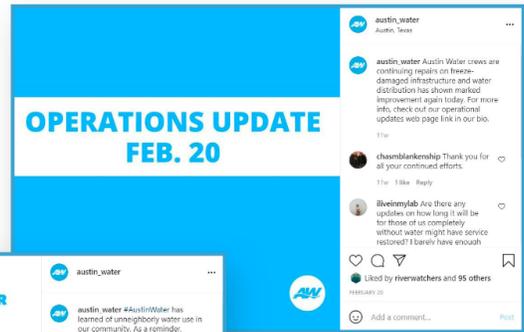
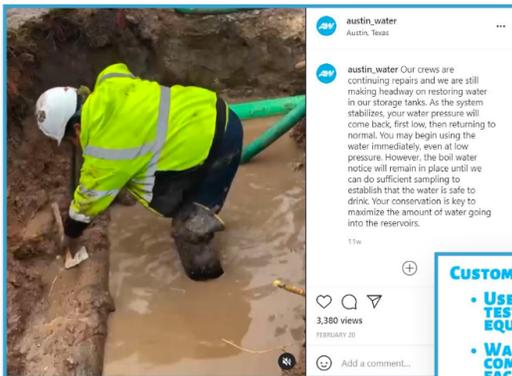
**61° / 26°**

**Sunny**



<p><b>Operations Status</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reservoirs hold about <b>50 million gallons</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Online Service Request Form in multiple languages</b></p> <p><b>30,000 requests</b> received over 4 days</p>	<p><b>Social Media</b></p> <p>Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NextDoor</li> <li>Twitter</li> <li>Facebook</li> <li>Instagram</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communications Message</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructions for flushing pipes</li> <li><b>Press Release: Emergency Water Use Restrictions</b> due to operation of commercial car washes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conservation Messaging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued calls for conservation</li> <li><b>Press Release: Emergency Water Use Restrictions</b> due to operation of commercial car washes</li> </ul>	

**Calls Made to Dispatch 878**



**CUSTOMERS MAY NOT:**

- USE WATER FOR IRRIGATION OR TESTING OF IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT**
- WASH VEHICLES, INCLUDING AT COMMERCIAL CAR WASH FACILITIES**
- WASH PAVEMENT OR OTHER SURFACES**
- ADD WATER TO A POOL OR SPA**
- CONDUCT FOUNDATION WATERING**
- OPERATE AN ORNAMENTAL FOUNTAIN OR POND, OTHER THAN AERATION NECESSARY TO SUPPORT AQUATIC LIFE**

**FEBRUARY 2021**  
**21**  
**SUNDAY**

**Weather Conditions**

High / Low

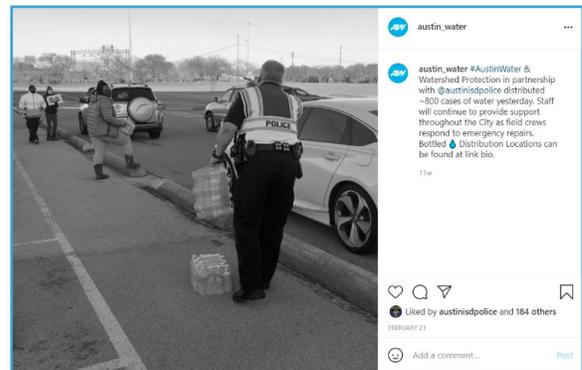
**75° / 46°**

**Overcast**



<p><b>Operations Status</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South, Northwest A, North and Southwest A pressure zones moved from water outage to low pressure.</li> <li>Reservoir levels reach <b>90 million gallons</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Online Service Request Form in multiple languages</b></p> <p><b>30,000 requests</b> received over 4 days</p>	<p><b>Social Media</b></p> <p>Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NextDoor</li> <li>Twitter</li> <li>Facebook</li> <li>Instagram</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communications Message</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of water distribution sites</li> <li>FAQs about restoring water and flushing pipes</li> <li>Reminders to keep boiling water</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conservation Messaging</b></p> <p>Continued calls for conservation with Emergency Water Use Restrictions still in place</p>	

**Calls Made to Dispatch 638**



**FEBRUARY 2021**  
**22**  
**MONDAY**

**Weather Conditions**

High / Low

**76° / 42°**

**Sunny**



**Operations Status**

- ◆ **Morning:** Boil Water Notice lifted for Central Zone
- ◆ **Afternoon:** Water restored to all customers. Boil Water Notice lifted for South, North, and Northwest A pressure zones
- ◆ Water reservoir levels reach **122 million gallons**

**Communications Message**

- ◆ **Press Releases (2):** Boil Water Notice lifted for certain pressure zones
- ◆ Launch interactive map and troubleshoot performance issues
- ◆ Virtual Press Conference
- ◆ Scam Alert

**Social Media**

Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on

- ◆ NextDoor
- ◆ Twitter
- ◆ Facebook
- ◆ Instagram

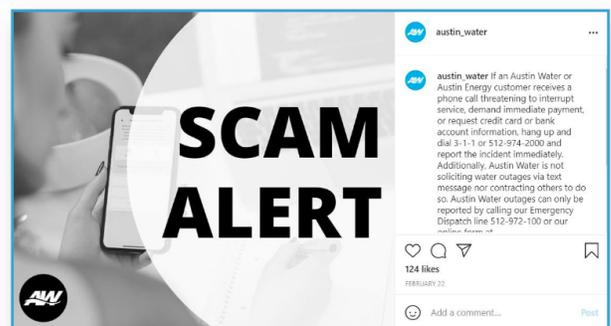
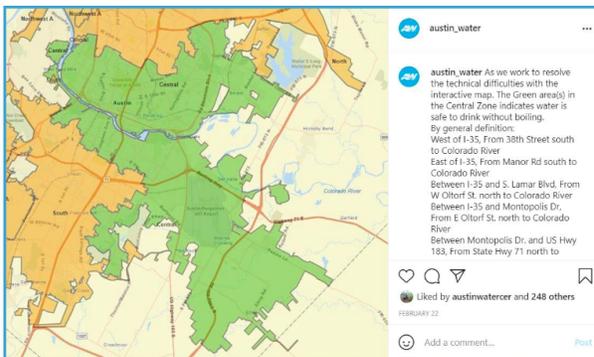
**Conservation Messaging**

- ◆ **Mandatory Water Use Restrictions Remain in Place**

**My ATX Water Customer Portal**

Rescind Boil Water Notice sent to Central, North, Northwest A, and South Pressure Zones (**126,903 texts and 132,968 emails sent**)

**Calls Made to Dispatch 697**

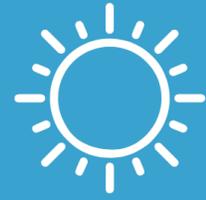


FEBRUARY 2021  
**23**  
 TUESDAY

Weather  
 Conditions

High / Low

**79° / 47°**



<p><b>Operations Status</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Boil Water Notice Lifted</b> for all customers.</li> <li>◆ <b>Mandatory Water Use Restrictions</b> Remain in Place</li> </ul>	<p><b>Warn Central Texas (Reverse 9-1-1)</b></p> <p>Citywide Notification of Rescinding Boil Water Notice: <b>1.1 million contacts</b></p>	<p><b>My ATX Water Customer Portal</b></p> <p>Rescind Boil Water Notice sent to Northwest B-C, Southwest A-C, and Lost Creek Pressure Zones (<b>47,437 texts</b> and <b>50,807 emails</b> sent)</p>
<p><b>Communications Message</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Press Release:</b> Boil Water Notice Lifted</li> <li>◆ <b>Warn Central Texas</b> notification in English and Spanish</li> <li>◆ <b>Boil Water Notice</b> in multiple languages (Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Arabic)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conservation Messaging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Mandatory Water Use Restrictions</b> Remain in Place</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Media</b></p> <p>Austin Water Public Information Office posted frequent updates on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NextDoor</li> <li>Twitter</li> <li>Facebook</li> <li>Instagram</li> </ul>

**Calls Made to Dispatch 619**

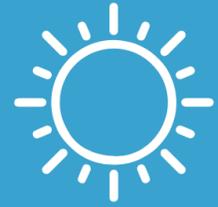


FEBRUARY 2021  
**24**  
WEDNESDAY

**Weather  
Conditions**

High / Low

**86° / 64°**



**Operations Status**

- ◆ Mandatory Water Use Restrictions Lifted

**Communications Message**

- ◆ Promote Emergency Repair Resources
- ◆ Begin messaging for apartment/condo residents

**Social Media**

Austin Water  
Public Information Office  
posted frequent updates on

NextDoor

Twitter

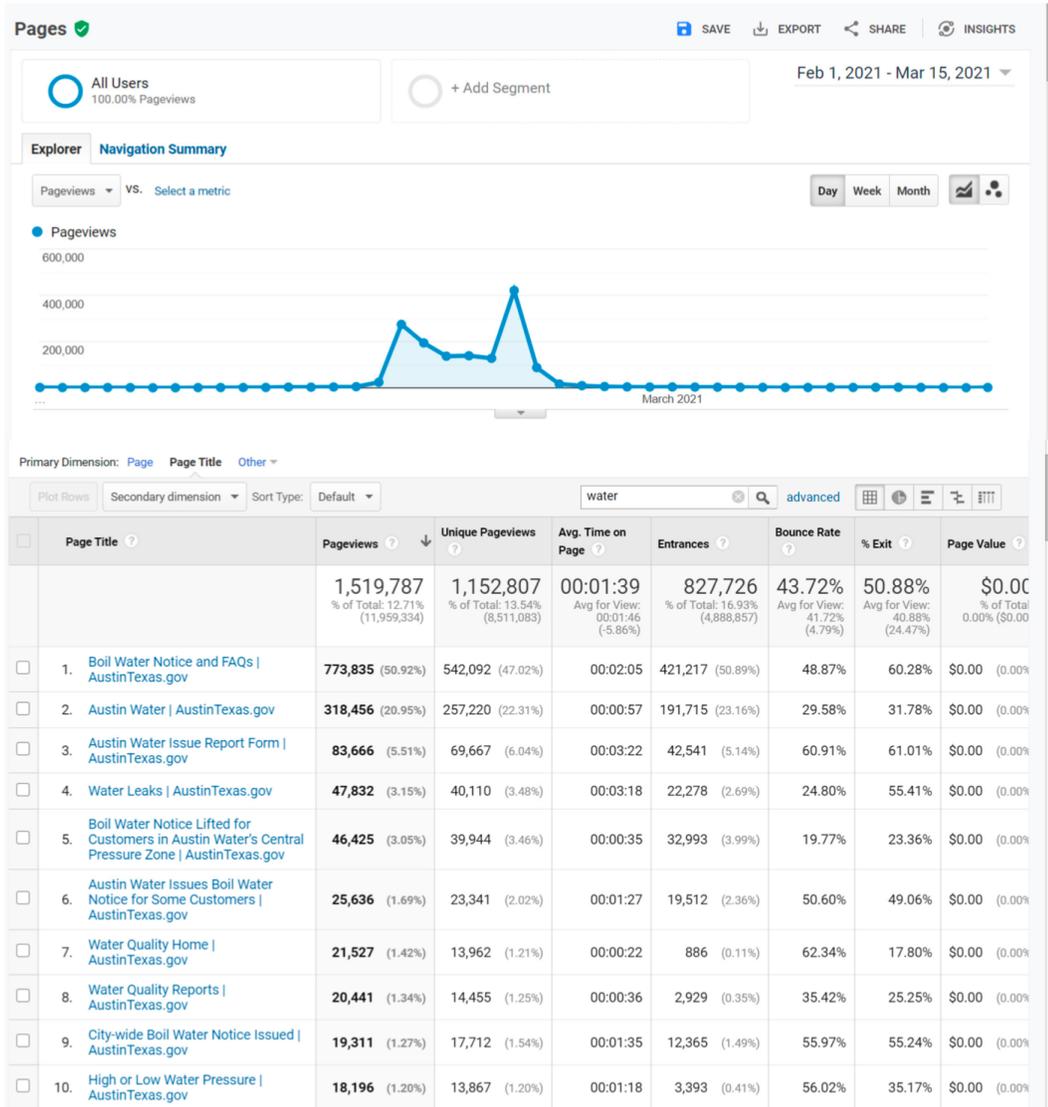
Facebook

Instagram



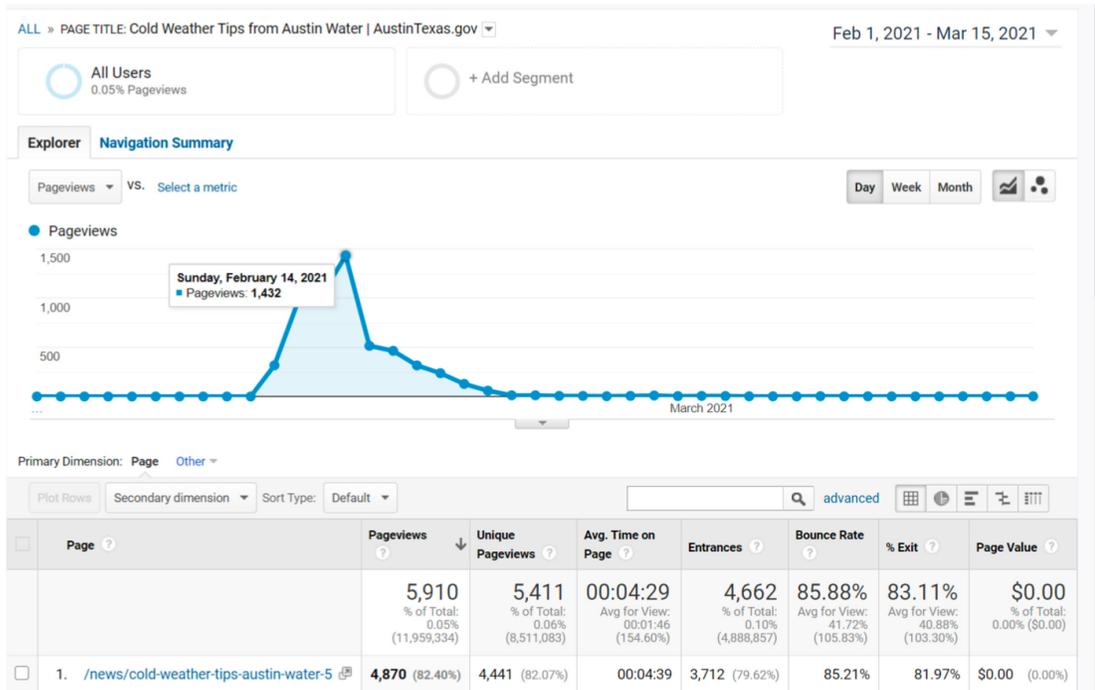
# WEBSITE PERFORMANCE

The analytics shown on the following pages illustrate peaks in traffic to specific web pages based on communications messaging pushed to the community through social posts and media coverage.



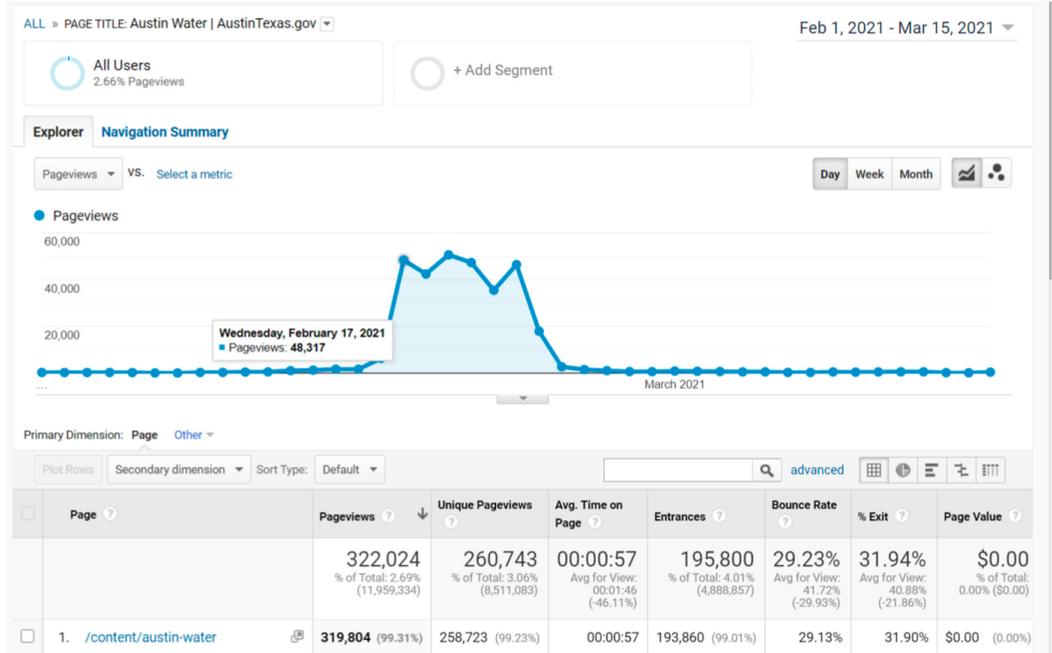
**Overall web traffic peaked between mid-February and early March on web pages related to the winter storm – Boil Water Notice, Issue Report Form, Operational Updates, etc.**

# WEBSITE PERFORMANCE



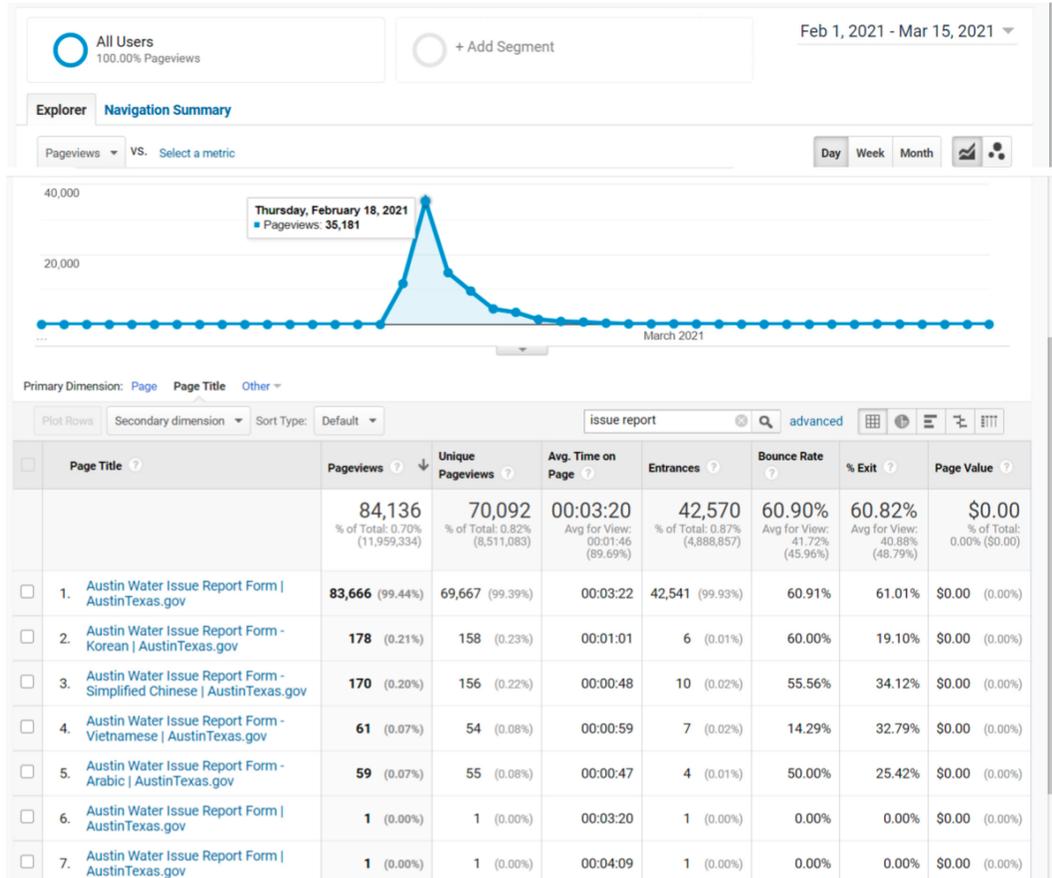
Web traffic to web pages containing cold weather preparedness tips peaked between February 11 and February 14. The media release was distributed on February 10.

# WEBSITE PERFORMANCE



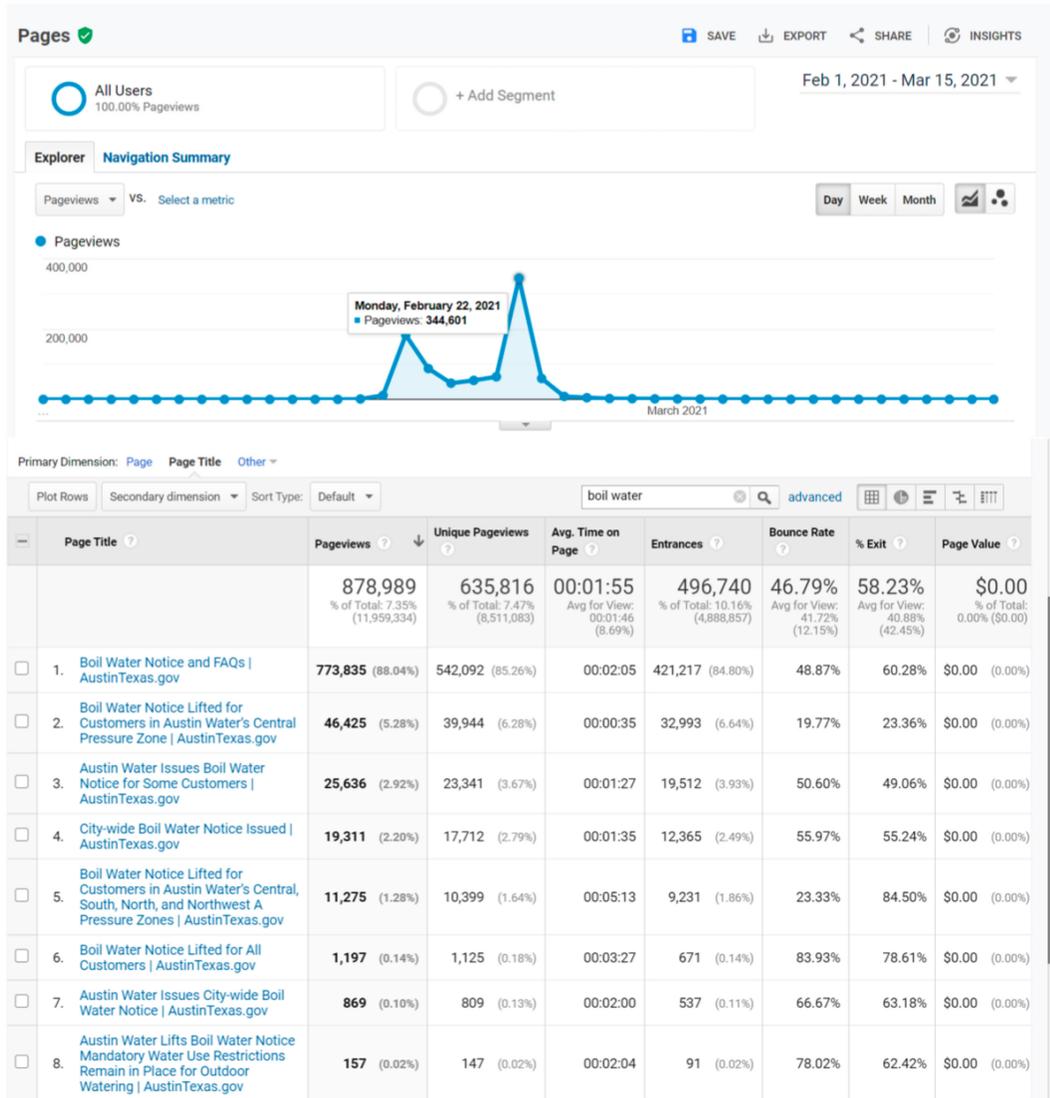
**Web traffic to the Austin Water landing page peaked and remained at elevated levels during the Boil Water Notice (February 17 – February 23).**

# WEBSITE PERFORMANCE



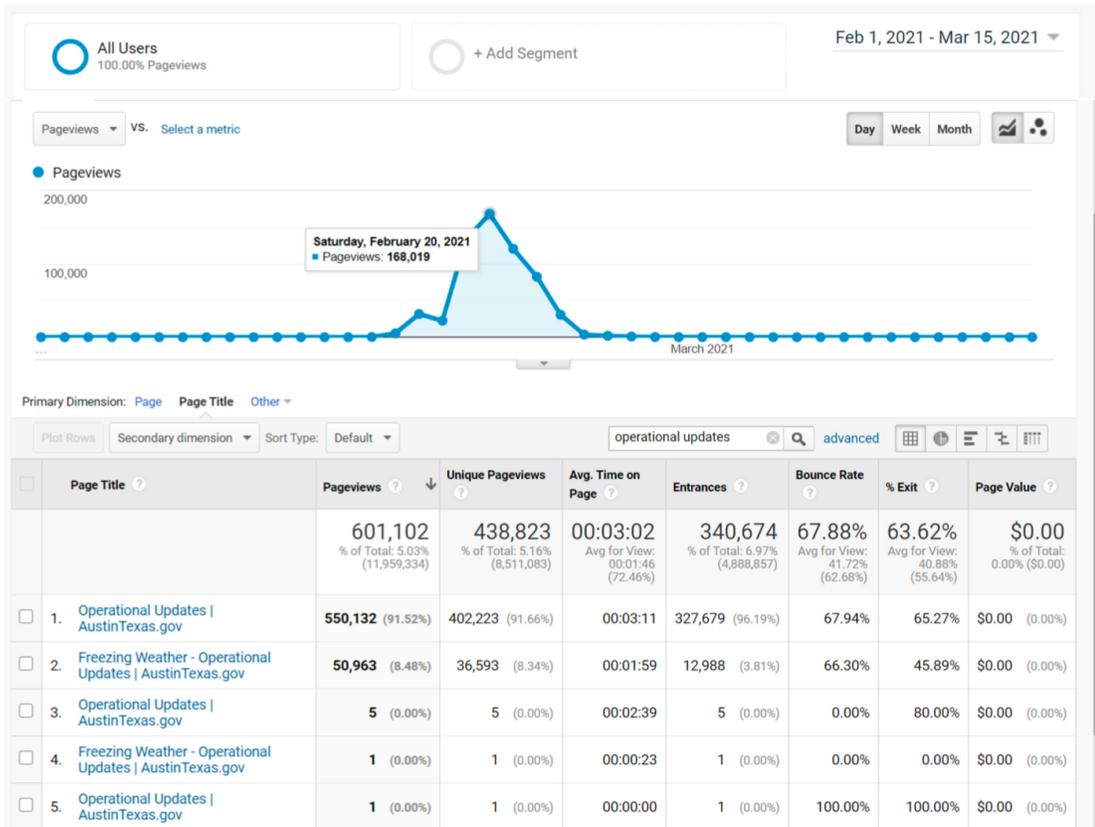
Traffic to the web site to submit issue report forms for leaks or water quality peaked as Austin Water pushed out information about how to report outages online.

# WEBSITE PERFORMANCE



Customers sought answers to frequently asked questions related to the Boil Water Notice with nearly 900,000 visits to these pages.

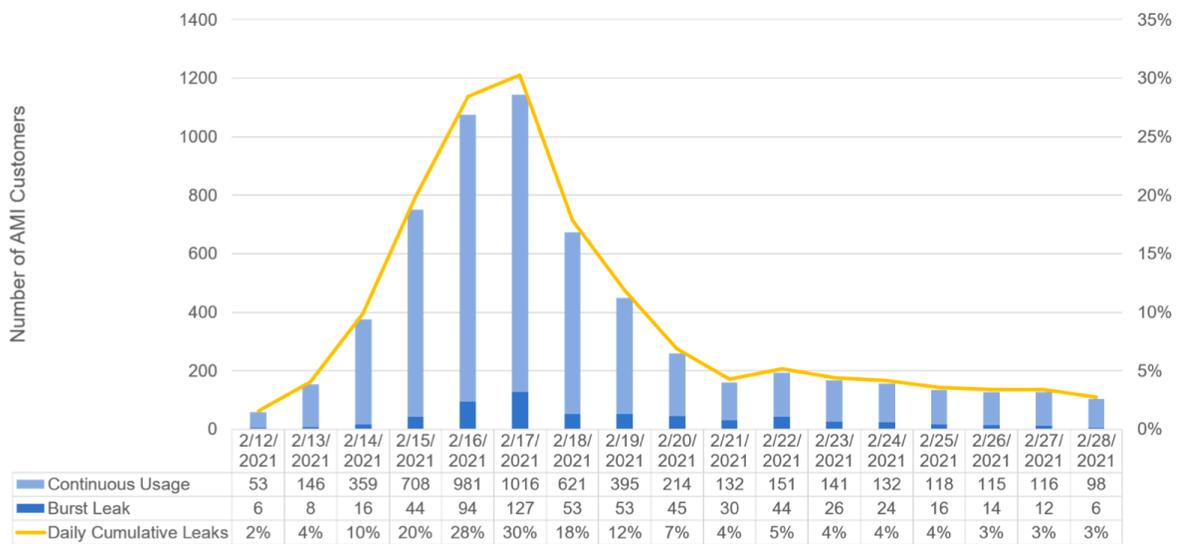
# WEBSITE PERFORMANCE



**Twice daily operational updates were widely viewed on the website with more than 600,000 visits.**

# CUSTOMER DATA FROM MY ATX WATER CUSTOMER PORTAL (AMI)

## Continuous Usage & Burst Leaks Identified in Portal



# CUSTOMER DATA FROM MY ATX WATER CUSTOMER PORTAL (AMI)

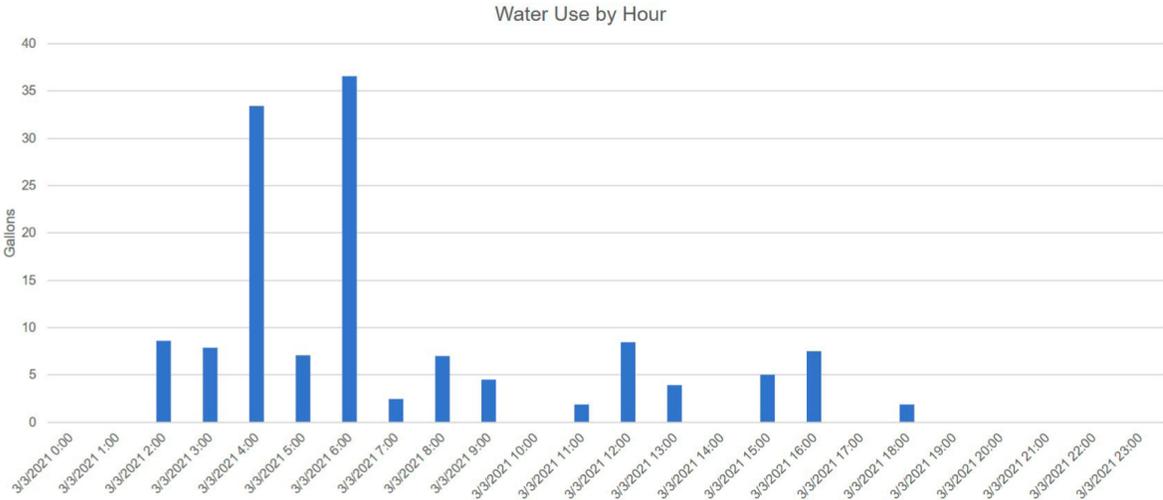
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## Example Customer Profiles

- ◆ The following pages show examples of two customers who had leaks identified during the freeze event.
- ◆ **Customer 1**  
Running a hose to prevent a freeze, transitioning into a burst leak.
- ◆ **Customer 2**  
Burst leak from a frozen irrigation line.

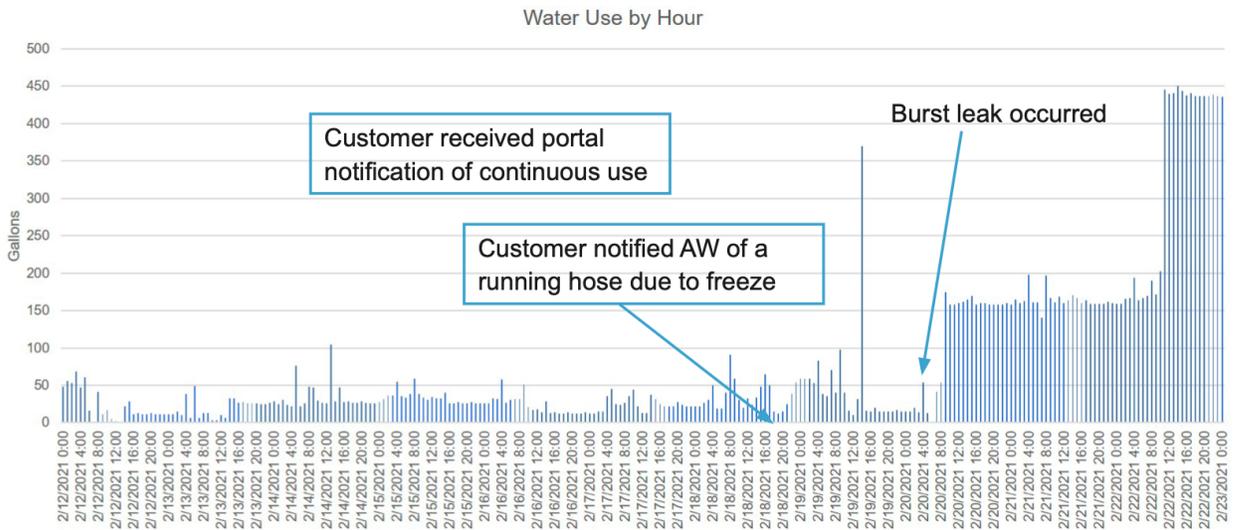
# CUSTOMER DATA FROM MY ATX WATER CUSTOMER PORTAL (AMI)

## Normal Use Example



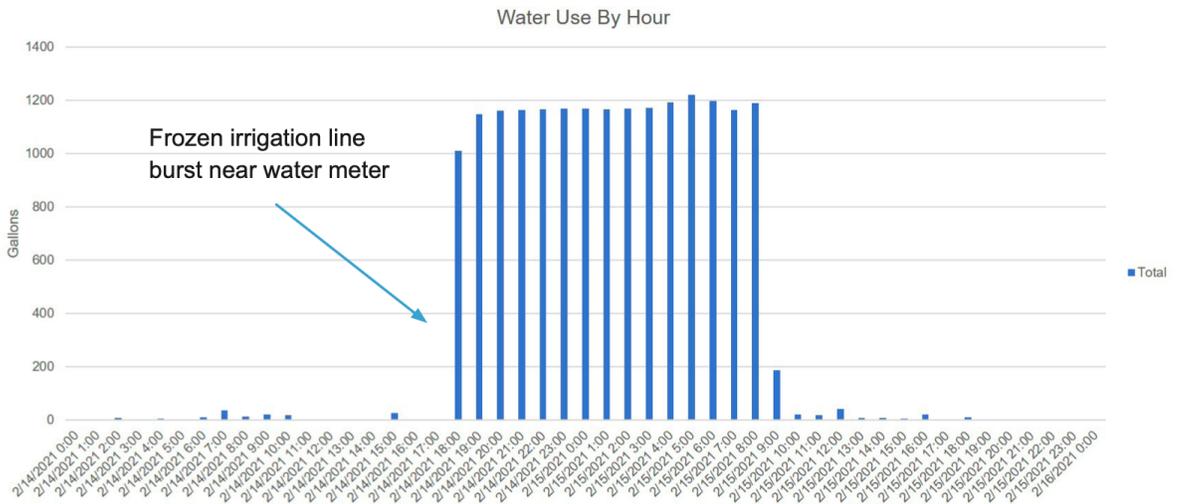
# CUSTOMER DATA FROM MY ATX WATER CUSTOMER PORTAL (AMI)

## Customer #1 Continuous Usage Alert into a Burst Leak



# CUSTOMER DATA FROM MY ATX WATER CUSTOMER PORTAL (AMI)

## Customer #2 Burst Leak





# February Freeze Facebook

**Feb 10 - Feb 26, 2021**



**Posts**

**87**  
posts

**Page Impressions**

**1.7M**  
impressions

**Page Reactions (All) > Type**



**Top posts**



**A** Austin Water  
Feb 21, 22:48

Thank you for all you are doing! Conservation is key to maximize the amount of water going into the reservoirs. We need a minimum of 100 million gallons in storage to help

**402** likes



**A** Austin Water  
Feb 19, 09:37

Austin Water Operations Update We want to give you some updates about the progress we made today in our efforts to restore water to our customers. We know you want to know

**340** likes

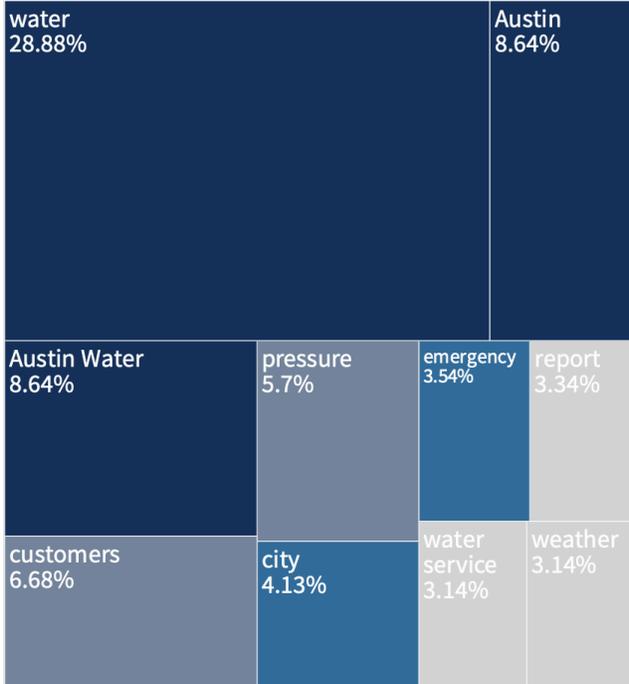


**A** Austin Water  
Feb 23, 17:58

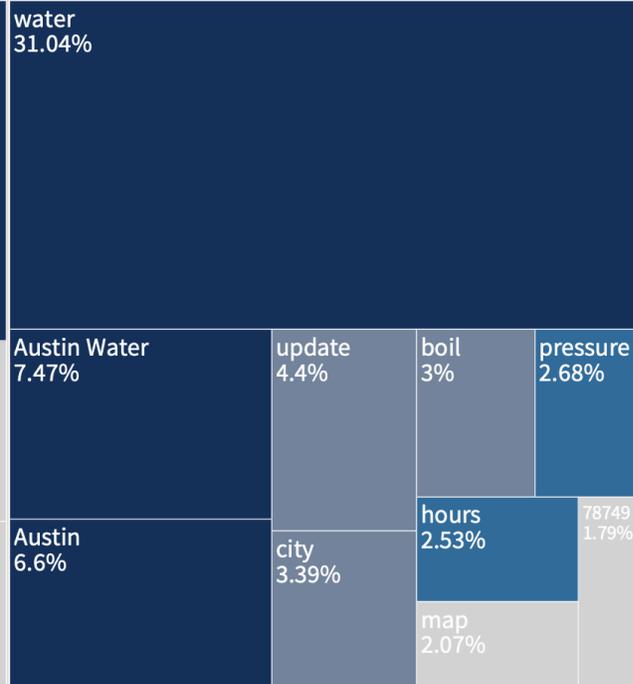
Austin Water has lifted the boil water notice for all customers. Customers no longer need to boil water used for drinking, cooking and, making ice. Residential customers

**319** likes

**Posts > Topics**



**Inbound Messages > Topics**





**Austin Water** ✓  
Published by Zambrano Mary · February 16 at 6:01 PM · 🌐

1. There are NO plans to disrupt water service. Our plants are operating normally. Austin Water customers, there is NO need to boil your water. Our treatment plants are working well and we have adequate supply. 2. Emergency Dispatch Crews (512-972-1000) are responding to water main breaks and customer assistance if the property owner cut-off valve does not work or you are unable to locate it. See image:

### Locate Your Water Meter



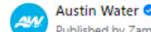
63,056  
People Reached

7,968  
Engagements

Boost Post

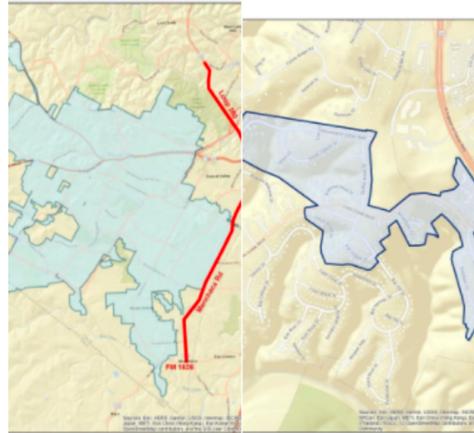
👍👎❤️ 89

37 Comments 426 Shares



**Austin Water** ✓  
Published by Zambrano Mary · February 17 at 11:26 AM · 🌐

Austin Water is asking customers in southwest Austin and Lost Creek neighborhood to boil their water prior to using it for drinking or cooking, until further notice. Affected areas are indicated below. This boil water notice is currently in specific areas and is a precautionary measure to ensure the health and safety of our customers. Austin Water has not detected contaminants in the water we are providing. More information can be found at <http://austintexas.gov/boilH2o>



67,850  
People Reached

9,435  
Engagements

Boost Post

👍👎👏 51

97 Comments 493 Shares



**Austin Water** ✓  
Published by Erik Luna · February 17 at 8:42 PM · 🌐

A city-wide boil water notice has been issued due to power loss at the Ullrich Water Treatment Plant, Austin Water's largest water treatment facility, and drops in water pressures below minimum standards.

We worked with Austin Energy to quickly assess our system and restore power and are in the process of bringing Ullrich Water Treatment Plant back online.

Any water recovered from plumbing systems should be boiled before drinking or cooking with it following the guidelines ... See More



147,789  
People Reached

18,763  
Engagements

Boost Post

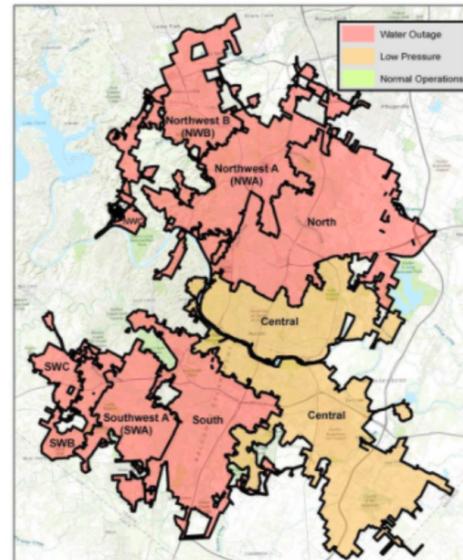
👍👎👏 113

188 Comments 1K Shares



**Austin Water** ✓  
Published by Zambrano Mary · February 19 at 9:00 AM · 🌐

This map shows how the water system is currently performing. Each zone is an area experiencing outages (red) or low pressure (orange). The goal is for each zone to get to green again, where the system is operating normally & the boil water notice can be lifted. As we work to repair and restore our water system, we need everyone to conserve water as much as possible. Using as little water as possible will allow us to put excess water produced into storage, which is critical fo... See More



108,158  
People Reached

20,186  
Engagements

Boost Post

👍👎👏 248

156 Comments 817 Shares



Austin Water

Published by Austin Mayfield · February 19 at 3:37 AM ·

### Austin Water Operations Update

We want to give you some updates about the progress we made today in our efforts to restore water to our customers. We know you want to know when your water service will be restored. We so desperately want to give you that answer as soon as we can. Our three water treatment plants are operating in a stable mode and produced 86 million gallons of water in the past 12 hours. For reference, our typical production at this time of year is around 14... See More



60,836  
People Reached

13,875  
Engagements

Boost Post

370

111 Comments 381 Shares



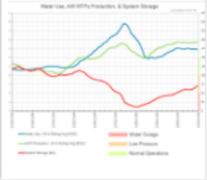
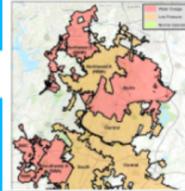
Austin Water

Published by Hootsuite · February 21 at 6:00 AM ·

We continue to see improvement in water pressure in our water distribution system. This morning, the South and Northwest A zones moved from Red (Water Outage) to Orange (Low Pressure). Individual water pressure and service may vary from house to house within a zone.

Storage in our water reservoirs has climbed to 72 million gallons. We need at least 100 million gallons in storage to help build water pressure system-wide. We urge customers with water service to limit water us... See More

### OPERATIONS UPDATE FEB. 21 - A.M.



42,188  
People Reached

7,536  
Engagements

Boost Post

231

187 Comments 260 Shares



Austin Water

Published by Hootsuite · February 21 at 4:48 PM ·

Thank you for all you are doing! Conservation is key to maximize the amount of water going into the reservoirs. We need a minimum of 100 million gallons in storage to help build pressure system-wide. Currently, we are at 90 million gallons and rising! #AustinWater



65,190  
People Reached

9,644  
Engagements

Boost Post

532

94 Comments 435 Shares

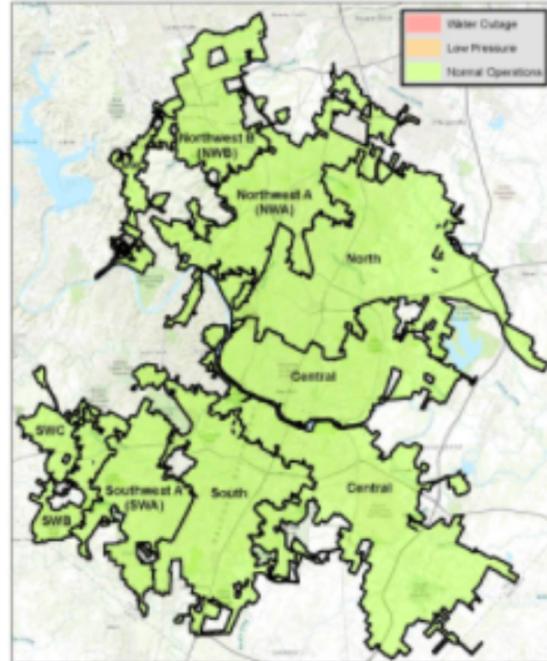


Austin Water

Published by Hootsuite · February 23 at 11:58 AM ·

Austin Water has lifted the boil water notice for all customers. Customers no longer need to boil water used for drinking, cooking and, making ice.

Residential customers may return to regular INDOOR water use. #AustinWater #ThankYouAustin



### Reach More People With This Post

Promote your Page by boosting this post so more people can see it: "Austin Water has lif..."

41,917  
People Reached

4,832  
Engagements

Boost Post

461

61 Comments 318 Shares



## February Freeze Instagram

**Feb 10 - Feb 26, 2021**

 austin\_water

**New Followers**

**2.9K**  
followers

**Post Engagement**

**10K**  
engagements

**Inbound Messages**

**411**  
messages

**Audience > Age**

AGE	#
25-34	1.8K
35-44	1.1K
45-54	367
18-24	153
55-64	140
65+	60
13-17	2

**Top Posts**



**austin\_water**  
Feb 23, 17:59

Austin Water has lifted the boil water notice for all customers. Customers no longer need to boil water used for drinking, cooking and, making ice. Residential customers

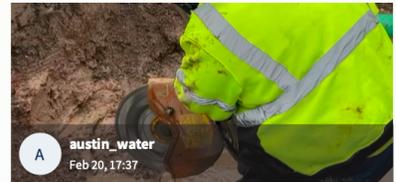
**699** likes



**austin\_water**  
Feb 21, 22:48

Thank you for all you are doing! Conservation is key to maximize the amount of water going into the reservoirs. We need a minimum of 100 million gallons in storage to help

**656** likes



**austin\_water**  
Feb 20, 17:37

Our crews are continuing repairs and we are still making headway on restoring water in our storage tanks. As the system stabilizes, your water pressure will come back, first

**584** likes



## February Freeze Twitter

**Feb 10 - Feb 26, 2021**

 @AustinWater

Engagement

30K engagements

Net New Followers

17K followers

Mentions

13K mentions

Inbound Messages

14K messages

Top Tweets > Likes



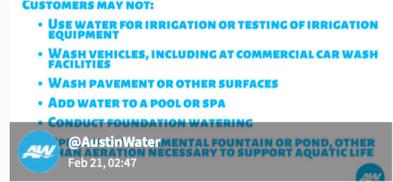
Our crews are continuing repairs and we are still making headway on restoring water in our storage tanks. As the system stabilizes, your water pressure will come back, first

1172 likes



Thank you for all you are doing! Conservation is key to maximize the amount of water going into the reservoirs. We need a minimum of 100 million gallons in storage to help

1011 likes

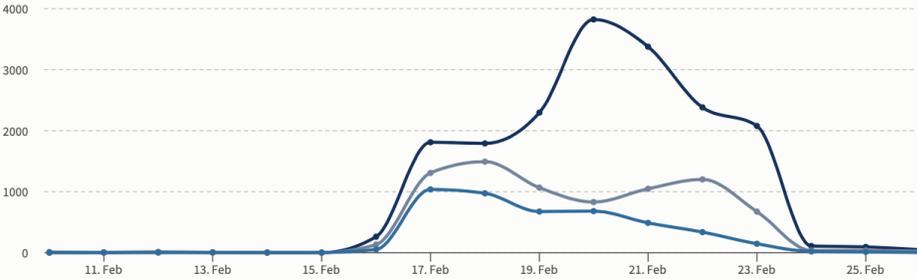


#AustinWater has learned of unneighborly water use in our community. As a reminder, essential water use and conservation are needed in order to pull out of this

608 likes

Engagement > Type

Likes Retweets Replies



Received DMs

1K DMs

# Appendix B: Proposed Austin Water Incident Management Team Communications Staffing Structure



# Public Information

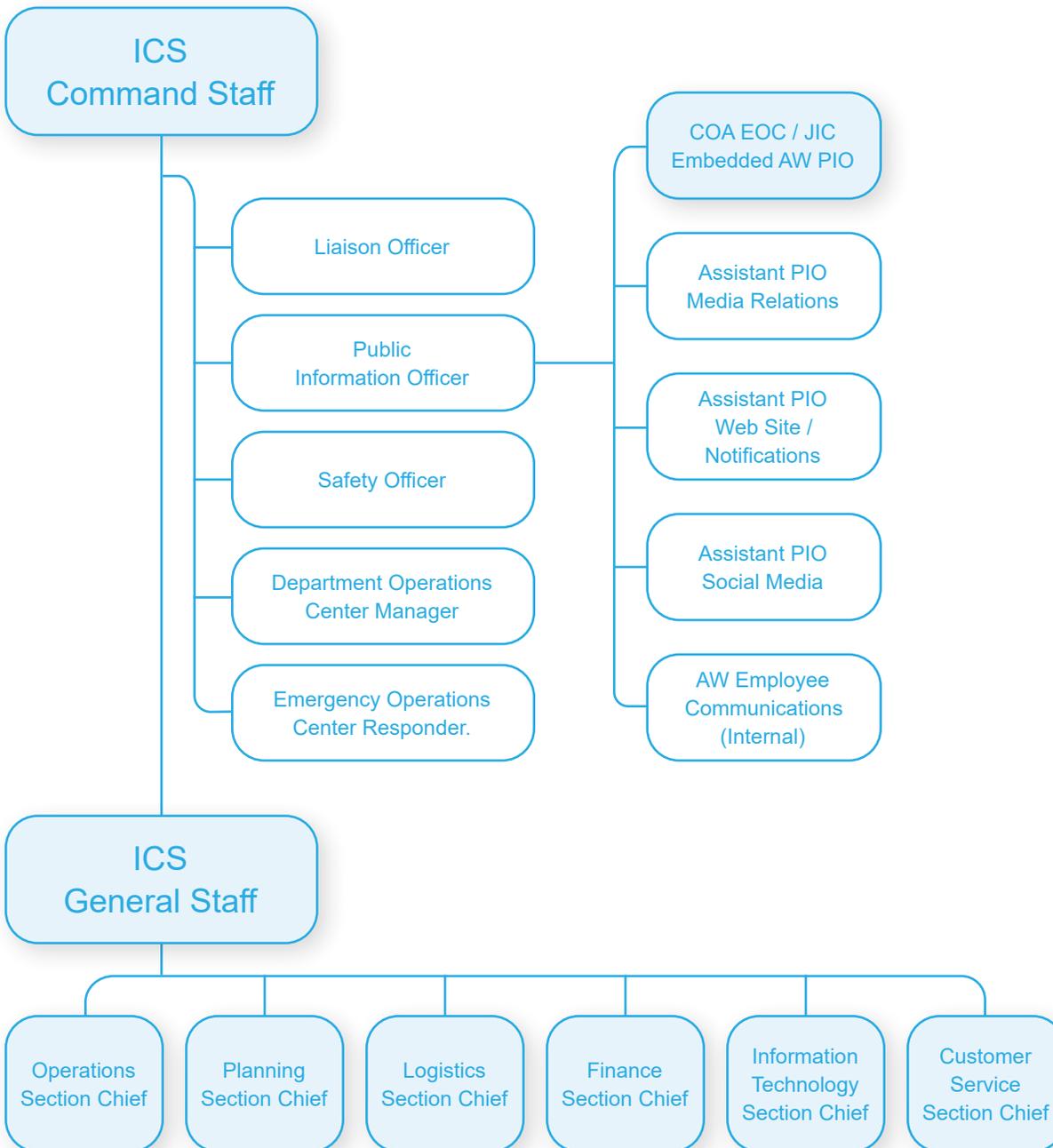
## Incident Management Team Organization

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### AUSTIN WATER INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

#### Proposed Communications Staffing Structure



# Public Information

## Incident Management Team Organization

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### COMMUNICATIONS ROLES & FUNCTIONS

#### Roles

**Public Information Officer:** Establishes communication objectives and makes staff assignments to achieve them; identifies key messages and communications strategies; reviews and refines deliverables prior to Incident Commander approval; keeps AW Leaders, Liaison Officer, EOC/JIC informed of communications activities; reviews and approves situational reports to AW employees

**EOC / JIC AW PIO:** Liaison to EOC/JIC activities, offering regular updates on AW communications activities; coordinates translations of materials with COA language access liaisons; keeps Public Information Officer apprised of broader City efforts that may shape communications strategy and messaging

#### Functions

**Media Relations:** Drafts, gains approvals, and disseminates media releases; coordinates responses to media inquiries and interview requests; prepares talking points for press conferences and coaches staff on key messages; coordinates b-roll and photos of recovery activities

**Web Site / Notifications:** Prepares notifications messaging for Warn Central Texas alerts; drafts and distributes notifications through MyATXWater customer portal; prepares status updates for web pages, including explainer videos, outage maps, FAQ's, etc.; provides script content for 3-1-1, Dispatch, and Customer Care call centers

**Social Media:** Provides frequent posts with information about incident impacts and customers affected (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, NextDoor); monitors feeds for trending issues and reports to Public Information Officer; responds to customer inquiries; promotes media releases and web site information and updates; identifies and coordinates posts for translation

**AW Employee Communications (Internal):** Provides daily situational reports to AW employees with information about operational objectives and system, media coverage, policies and procedures, safety information, etc.

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## **Water PIO Contact Information:**

**24/7 Access: (910) 622-8472**

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