



Vermont Water Utility Arrearage Survey

Testimony by Tom DiPietro, Green Mountain Water Environment Association, Past President
Senate Committee on Finance

February 9, 2021

GMWEA is a non-profit organization that promotes public awareness of Vermont's drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems and supports the professional community that provides water quality management services to Vermonters. Our 450 members are primarily facility operators, engineers, scientists, and public works staff from throughout Vermont. Collectively we provide a resource of expertise on the practical aspects of water quality management, infrastructure issues, and policy implementation.

The GMWEA public relations committee surveyed VT water utilities between 1/19/21 and 1/28/21 to ask them for current arrearage data. For our survey, we defined an arrearage as a fee that has been unpaid after 60 or more days. Please note, this value will include arrearages that are not COVID related. Our survey, and our utilities, are not able to parse out the reason for non-payment, only the amount. We heard from representatives of 96 systems in Vermont that provide water resource services (wastewater, drinking water and stormwater). A summary of the information received is provided below:

Existing Arrearages

- Wastewater: \$1,823,792.70
- Drinking Water: \$1,750,548.41
- Stormwater: \$ 137,553.63
- **Total: \$3,704,625.27**

Statistical Information

- Number of Systems Providing Arrearage Data: 96
- Estimated Population of Systems Providing Arrearage Data: 324,791
- Estimated Total Population of All Systems in Vermont: 454,466
- Percent of Population Represented in Arrearage Data: 71%
- Prorated Total Arrearage Funding Required: \$5,218,000

Summary of Comments Received from Water Utilities:

- Impacts were highly variable depending upon the community. Some areas saw no changes, while others are seeing significant changes.
- Many drinking water systems suspended meter installation work. Difficult for staff to safely enter homes.
 - This will lead to utilities getting behind in their replacement programs. That could have a potential affect in lost revenue and unaccounted for water because when meters fail they tend to fail reading low.



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- Reports that capital improvement projects and maintenance projects were deferred.
- Regular maintenance was impacted due to staff furloughs.
- Funding limited for future emergency response.
- Supply chains are impacted. There is a delay getting many things from lab supplies to pump parts.
- Early on, during the toilet paper shortage, people flushing things that aren't toilet paper which caused pump damage.

Based on this, we hope that the State of Vermont will continue to fund the VCAAP program. We recommend that at least \$5,250,000 be provided to help Vermonters and Vermont water resources utilities address the financial and economic hardships associated with the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.