



Navigating Uncharted Waters: A look back at 2020, And what's ahead in 2021

By Gary Martin, Board President, Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency

To say that 2020 was a challenging year for us all, is putting it mildly. A global pandemic coupled with our own local challenges, in just the third year of operations as your new valley-wide water provider, brought uncertainty and change as we navigated uncharted waters.

While the situations and circumstances may have been unfamiliar, SCV Water faced them with expertise, professionalism and compassion. We assessed the situation, adjusted our sails, and adapted to meet the challenges while holding fast to our mission: Providing responsible water stewardship to ensure the Santa Clarita Valley has reliable supplies of high quality water at a reasonable cost.

Ensuring a Reliable Water Supply While Navigating COVID-19

With the onset of COVID-19, the importance of water in our lives was brought into even sharper focus as hand washing became one of the primary safety protocols in the fight against this awful pandemic. SCV Water went to work to modify our operations so that we could continue to deliver clean water to you, our customers, around the clock, while still maintaining the health and safety of our workforce.

Field crews put protocols in place such as the use of PPE and allowing only one person per vehicle. Much of the office staff transitioned to working from home. To protect the safety of our customers and community, we transformed our board and committee meetings, gardening classes, school education programs and conservation rebate programs to a virtual format, allowing our customers to still participate, but from the comfort and safety of their homes.

We continued to maintain customer care excellence under these new circumstances. While public lobbies closed, customers still had the options of email, phone or external drop-boxes, plus we added a new PayNearMe service available at 7-Eleven and CVS stores. We also suspended all service shut-offs and late fees to protect our customers who are struggling due to an unexpected financial hardship or loss of income. And we're working with these customers to establish payment plans.

Removing PFAS from Our Water Supplies

2020 also brought our continuing efforts to remove per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) from our groundwater supplies. PFAS are a group of manmade chemicals that are found in thousands of commonly used products like non-stick cookware and food wrappers and have entered our water supply over the years.

A PFAS "strike team," made up of SCV Water staff and industry experts was mobilized in 2019 to respond to the PFAS challenge. This team oversaw the design and construction of our first on-site treatment facility, which opened in October 2020. It is one of the first in California, and we are working on a system-wide plan to prioritize and address the remaining 17 wells which were proactively removed from service. Several additional treatment facilities are in the design or bid phase, and two will come online in 2022.

SCV Water did not put these chemicals in the water, but we will continue the advancement of projects to remove PFAS from our water supplies. This will likely be a long-term effort, but we are committed to stay the course until this work is complete.

In the fall of 2020, SCV Water filed a lawsuit with several companies for their roles in introducing PFAS into our water supply. It is our hope that these efforts will lead to the recovery of costs for PFAS removal.

You can learn more about PFAS on our website at yourSCVwater.com/PFAS.

If Hindsight is 2020, What Does 2021 Bring?

As we start our fourth year as an integrated regional water agency, we will continue to pursue efforts to advance best-in-class strategies in efficient and effective operations. We will be guided by the goals and objectives articulated in the 5-year Strategic Plan adopted in June 2019, with appropriate course corrections to support the removal of PFAS contaminants in our local water supplies. For information contained in the strategic plan, visit yourSCVwater.com and find it under “Governance.”

Watershed-wide Focus

SCV Water has taken a leadership role to preserve and protect the Upper Santa Clara Valley watershed while providing for long-term water supply reliability through pro-active water supply planning. These efforts are driven by our core values of integrity, excellence, safety, innovation, professionalism and trust. Here are just a few underway, and all have opportunities for your involvement. Visit yourSCVwater.com/planning to learn more.

- **Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP):** Required every five years, this plan directs our long-term resource planning to ensure adequate water supplies meet existing and future needs.
- **Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP):** A new requirement, and part of the UWMP, the WSCP will develop mitigation actions to take in the event we are faced with critical water shortage conditions such as those brought on by drought, earthquakes, fires or other catastrophes.
- **Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP):** Since early 2020, the Santa Clarita Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SCV-GSA) Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) has helped steer efforts to meet the requirements to sustainably manage groundwater in our basin. In 2021, the SAC will continue its advisory efforts and the Final GSP is due in January 2022. To learn more about the SCV-GSA, visit yourSCVwater.com and find it under “Your Water.”

Looking ahead, 2021 will also bring our first integrated rates transition case, the expansion of recycled water use, and more opportunities than ever to interact with SCV Water in a digital environment. We look forward to strengthening our existing partnerships, and forging new ones. And we look forward to serving you – our customers.

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