

SCV Water: Committed to Reliability

By Maria Gutzeit, SCV Water Board President

At the start of the year, we watched in horror as tragic fires devastated communities to the south of us. Not long after, our own valley was threatened by the Hughes Fire, which thankfully did not bring the same level of destruction. Before the Hughes Fire started – and during the emergency itself – we all wondered if what we saw in the Palisades and Altadena could happen to us. We immediately got questions from our neighbors. Will our hydrants work? Will our reservoirs go dry too? People were rightly worried. While there's a lot to worry about these days, locally a lot of things are being done well. At the Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency, our mission has long been providing reliable supplies of high-quality water at a reasonable cost.

What does “reliable” mean? To SCV Water, it means being here for you and to make sure we have water despite droughts, emergencies, and other challenges on the horizon. The Santa Clarita Valley is where we live and work. We raise our families here, and we want to see our valley thrive. To that end, the Agency has taken steps to prepare for emergency situations and continues to plan for future generations.

Problems in California include earthquakes, fires, and related power shutoffs. After the 1994 Northridge quake, many of our storage tanks were equipped with flexible connections so that in case of rapid movement, the connection wouldn't break as easily. Since we know that fires and Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) can cause loss of power to pumping equipment, we have arranged for fixed and portable generators so that pumps and the Castaic and Saugus treatment plants can run even if electricity is cut.

With regard to firefighting, specifically, all our services have to meet mandated fire flow requirements at the time they are installed. In older areas, pipelines are upsized and fire flow is increased to match current standards when lines are replaced.

During the design of storage tanks, SCV Water ensures fire flow volume and duration are met in each pressure zone. Storage in each zone is set based on the highest fire flow requirement within that zone. For example, if there is one hydrant at a school that requires 3,500 gallons per minute flow, the entire zone's fire flow is set to that level.

Hydrants are located based on fire department requirements and are spaced for redundancy. Both SCV Water and the fire department inspect and test hydrants regularly. If the hydrants or valves supplying them have problems, they are fixed by SCV Water.

SCV Water's Urban Water Management Plan is an extensive document that addresses planned growth, water supplies, and climate challenges. The plan ensures through single year or multi-year droughts we have enough water. It quantifies the multiple sources of water we have secured, from local groundwater, to water from the State

Water Project coming through the Sacramento Delta, to purchased supplies stored elsewhere. It also outlines potential problems that we mitigate for.

The soon-to-be-completed Master Plan Update process will help SCV Water continue to optimize service throughout the valley. After four agencies merged into one in 2018, regional planning became even easier. Multiple water storage tanks are often placed at one location so one tank can be serviced while the other one is in use. As an integrated agency, we are also more interconnected so large portions of our valley can be served with multiple sources of water, further protecting against localized outages.

Federal and State regulations also directly impact our water supply. There may be new restrictions on use of water from the State Water Project or limits on how we can use recycled water. Ever-changing conservation rules dictate how much water is allowed to be used indoors and out, and what type of landscape and fixtures can be installed in new developments. SCV Water always participates in the rulemaking process and explains how proposed rules could affect our operations and our customers.

Whether from emergencies, long-term climate shifts, or ever-changing regulations, our goal is always to make sure you have water. Right now, we are conducting new modeling to ensure even with multiple factors changing (climate, regulation, emergencies) that we are able to reliably serve our community's needs. SCV Water is a public agency and, as such, is non-profit, passing only operating costs on to water users. No utility can reach 100% reliability while maintaining a reasonable cost of service, but we aim to use the best tools and the best minds to get very, very close. Members of this community stick together and depend on each other, and we want you to rest assured that we are here for you.

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