

# Protect Our [Water] Sources

## Utility Information Sheet

Water. We all drink it, cook with it, bathe and wash our hands with it. Our pets can't go a day without it, and in the summer, we can't get enough of it.

This year, Arlington County's Department of Environmental Services (DES), and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) invite high school students to create art inspired by this precious resource, and its impact on the community.

To help you get your creativity flowing, below are some facts about water in Arlington.

## By the Numbers

- 118,880 households and 6,000+ businesses served in Arlington County (per 2019 Census)
- 37,200 water service connections (single account going to a single-family home or multi-family building)
- 23 million gallons a day (MGD) are consumed in Arlington (the summertime peak is ~ 35 MGD)
- 85 County-provided outdoor permanent bathrooms and drinking fountains in parks
- 500 miles of watermains
- 500 miles of water/sewer networks
- 16,000 valves
- 3,700 fire hydrants

## How Does Arlington's Water Cycle Work?

[Arlington's water comes](#) from the Potomac River, and is treated at the Washington Aqueduct in Washington, DC. This cleaned water then carried by pipes across the Potomac River into Arlington, and with the help of gravity is pumped throughout homes, parks, and other buildings from north to south.

Wastewater – the water that goes down your drains - is treated at the [Arlington County Water Pollution Plant](#) on South Glebe Road, and undergoes a cleaning process to be safe to go back into Four Mile Run, which flows into the Potomac River.

## How Does Our Water Get Cleaned?

All the water that comes out of your faucet is treated at Washington Aqueduct. Large particles are removed, smaller particles settle to the bottom the water and are filtered out, and then water is disinfected before coming to Arlington for everyone's consumption.

Testing happens every day, and very frequently for lead, copper, and other by products. Water is first tested at the plant, then again throughout the county. The annual ["Consumer Confidence Report,"](#) required by the Safe Drinking Water Act from the Environmental Protection Agency, tells you about the state of your water and findings of quality tests.

## How Do We Keep Our Water Clean?

Even though water is thoroughly treated before it arrives to your faucet, it's important to keep storm, stream, and river water clean before it arrives in treatment facilities.

We [protect our local streams](#) – like Four Mile Run and Long Branch – by minimizing pollution, or making sure we don't introduce contaminants from our daily activities. County programs like the new plastic bag tax, and community litter pick-up help keep our streams clean, which then helps keep pollution out of our Potomac River ecosystem.

Stormwater, rainwater, and snowmelt runoff picks up pollutants from impervious surfaces like driveways, roofs, and streets and carries it into our drains. The more polluted this runoff is, the more damaging it is to our local stream and river networks. Pollutants can be anything from pesticides, gasoline, and oil to deteriorating roof material. (Pro tip: properties with more unpaved ground that can soak in rainwater place less of a burden on the sewer system.)

## How is our Water Funded?

Arlington's Water program is not tax-funded; instead, customers are charged a fee based on the costs of maintaining the program. Using a fee instead of a tax provides the flexibility to change rates based on changes in costs, usage, and property types in the community.

The annual budget for the Water utility is \$106 million. This covers operations like maintenance and renewing of infrastructure, meter reading, customer service and billing, and staffing. The Water, Sewer program has a staff of 255 people who work in communications, finance, administration as well as all the staff who work at the plants such as, engineers, designers, and trades workers doing the maintenance of our infrastructure.