



# Waterlines

FEBRUARY 2016

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE MEDFORD WATER COMMISSION



## Plan your landscape

Get ready for spring with our recently updated Water-Wise Gardening website, where you can explore beautiful local gardens and find inspiration in hundreds of photos of front yards, backyards, patios, decks, walkways and more.

The site is found through a link on our homepage, [www.medfordwater.org](http://www.medfordwater.org), or scan the QR code below with your smartphone.



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Excellence in Water Quality  
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System Reliability

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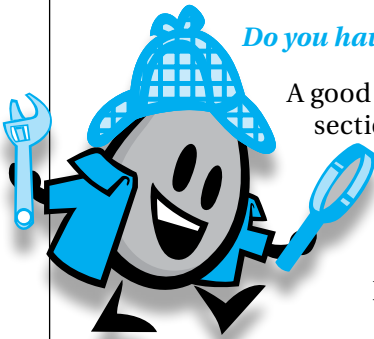
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## BE A LEAK DETECTIVE

**Drip. Drip. Drip.** The average American household wastes more than 10,000 gallons of water each year from easy-to-fix water leaks, according to the EPA. That's enough water to wash 270 loads of laundry.

If that doesn't seem like a lot, consider that across the country, easy-to-fix household leaks can add up to more than 1 trillion gallons of water every year – equal to the annual water use of more than 11 million homes.

That's why the Medford Water Commission (MWC) is joining with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to encourage our customers to find and fix leaks during the annual **Fix a Leak Week, March 14-20**. Fixing household leaks not only saves water, but also reduces your water bill. That's a win-win!



### Do you have a leak?

A good clue is the section of your water bill that shows how much water you used during the previous month,



as well as the graph comparing your water use to other months. While the size of your household and your water use habits will determine what's normal for your household, the typical single-family household in our area uses about 5,000 gallons of water per month during the winter and about 25,000 gallons during a hot summer month. If your use is much higher than this, you may have a leak.

Another simple step to investigate whether you have a leak is to check your water meter. Turn off all water (including automatic ice makers) when you are

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## IS THE DROUGHT OVER?

After making headlines the past two years, drought concerns seem less likely this summer as we kick off 2016 in rain gear.

At Big Butte Springs, our primary water source, Medford Water Commission (MWC) recorded 13.8 inches of precipitation in December and another

3.19 inches through Jan. 18, our press date. That's more than double the 20-year average of 6.23 inches for December and on pace to reach the 4.73-inch average for January.

What does this mean for summer?

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## LEAKS

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leaving the house for an hour or two. Then write down the numbers from your water meter. Do the same as soon as you return. If the register has changed, you likely have a leak.

### *The usual suspects*

Toilets are the most common source of household leaks. To test for a leak, put a few drops of food coloring in the toilet tank, then wait about 15 minutes. If dye appears in the toilet bowl without flushing, there is a leak.

If your toilet is leaking, the cause is often an old or faulty flapper. Over time, this inexpensive rubber part decays. Replacing the flapper is a relatively easy, inexpensive do-it-yourself project that pays for itself in no time.

If you do need to replace the entire toilet, be aware that MWC offers a rebate program that will pay up to \$85 per toilet when you purchase a low-flush toilet with the Water Sense label. While older toilets can use up to 7 gallons per flush, a new toilet with the WaterSense label uses just 1.28 gallons per flush. For more

details, visit [medfordwater.org](http://medfordwater.org) and click on the link to Rebates on the left side of the screen. Or, call our conservation team at 541-774-2435.

Dripping faucets and showerheads can waste a surprising amount of water. A leak that drips at the rate of one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons per year – the amount of water needed to take more than 180 showers!

Leaky faucets are usually caused by worn washers or “O” rings. Repairing this type of leak often involves little more than turning off the supply line to the faucet, replacing the washer, and turning the line on again. Most leaky showerheads can be fixed by ensuring a tight connection using pipe tape and a wrench.

To tackle more serious leaks, you may need to contact a leak detection company or plumber with specialized leak detection equipment. If you repair a leak promptly and notify the Medford Water Commission, you may be eligible to receive an adjustment on up to three monthly bills.

A little attention and often simple repairs can save you – and our water system – from unnecessary expenses. So start being a leak detective today.

Three months into the current water year, precipitation at Big Butte Springs was just under 19 inches – well ahead of the 13.35-inch average for October, November and December. However, annual precipitation at the springs averages about 33 inches, so the watershed had received only 57 percent of the total precipitation needed to call this an “average” water year. Spring precipitation as well as snowmelt will play an important role in determining whether drought makes headlines again this summer.

Thankfully, MWC has been less impacted by drought and lack of snow than some other water providers. The Big Butte Springs are fed from precipitation received on Mt. McLoughlin, which is unusually porous, and whether received as rain or snow, nearly all precipitation received goes into the ground, rather than much of it running off, as occurs in most watersheds. Though the springs do show declines, they are not as impacted by a single year’s precipitation as many other water supplies that rely on snowmelt to recharge streams and aquifers.

The Rogue River also contributes significantly to MWC’s ability to meet demands, particularly in years where water supplies are strained. While Big Butte Springs is our primary year-round source, MWC draws water from the Rogue in late spring and summer, when water demands increase as customers irrigate lawns, wash cars and fill pools. In normal water years, the Rogue provides about half of our water during peak summer months.

While the Robert A. Duff Treatment Plant on the river is currently undergoing an expansion to ensure our ability to serve our customers’ water needs into the future, MWC continues to remind and encourage customers to use water wisely, and to be aware that water use limitations are always a possibility if water supply conditions or facility malfunctions result in such actions being necessary and appropriate.

## Waterlines

is a quarterly publication of the

### **Medford Water Commission**

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## DROUGHT

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“Until the season plays out, we don’t know for sure,” says Dennis Burg, MWC’s operator at Big Butte Springs. “This will be my 12th season and they’re all kind of different. Without having a crystal ball, we don’t know how the water year is going to add up.”

Like most water suppliers in the West, MWC keeps precipitation records based on a **water year** that runs from October through September – not a calendar year. This is because late fall and winter precipitation helps fill reservoirs and build up snowpack that will provide water supplies throughout the following summer.