

Abenaki Water Company and Aquarion Company

DW 21-090

Aquarion Water Company's Responses to Staff Data Requests—Set 1

Data Request Received: May 17, 2021
Request No.: Staff 1-2

Date of Response: May 27, 2021
Witness: N.LaChance
D.Morrissey
D.Szabo

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- REQUEST: Ref. Petition p. 9. “The Transaction will enable these customers to take advantage of a broader range of customer-service, conservation, and technology options that are available within Aquarion.”
- a. Please describe any customer-service programs currently available to Abenaki customers.
 - b. Please describe Aquarion’s “broader range” of customer-service programs that would be available to Abenaki customers.
 - c. Please describe any conservation programs currently available to Abenaki customers.
 - d. Please describe Aquarion’s “broader range” of conservation programs that would be available to Abenaki customers.
 - e. Please describe any technology programs currently available to Abenaki customers.
 - f. Please describe Aquarion’s “broader range” of technology options that would be available to Abenaki customers.

RESPONSE:

- a. Abenaki provides walk-in and phone-based customer-service from it’s office in Gilford, NH from 8:00-4:30p, with additional support provided by NESC customer service staff in Plainville, CT during the same hours. Abenaki also offers online bill payment options.
- b. Under Aquarion management phone-based customer-service hours will be extended to 8:00a-5:30p. Aquarion utilizes advanced call management software to record calls and track call metrics to ensure its high standards of customers service are continuously being achieved.

Aquarion offers customers facing financial hardship a bill credit through a one-time voucher program and/or a financial hardship payment plan with special 24-month payment arrangements. Complete details are available on the company website (<https://www.aquarionwater.com/customer-care/customer-assistance-programs>) without needing to contact customer service directly for information.

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To help support these, and other customer service goals, Aquarion also maintains a robust social media presence. They provide information both proactively and reactively through it's Facebook and LinkedIn channels, endeavoring to provide customers with as many options as possible to interact with Aquarion

Aquarion also offers more in person payment options, with payments accepted at any Walmart location within New Hampshire.

- c. Abenaki does not offer a formal conservation program.
- d. Following the 2016 drought, Aquarion has been successful in implementing a conservation program in areas with high per capita demand and/or supply constraints. This program uses a mix of messaging/education and irrigation restrictions to help manage demands. In 2021, the conservation education program is being expanded to include more Aquarion customers. Aquarion intends to implement similar programs for Abenaki customers, as appropriate.
- e. Abenaki, through its parent (NESC) uses billing/customer service management software to track payment of all bills. They have also implemented an online bill payment portal. Abenaki customers also have access to Abenaki's emergency alert software that enables Abenaki to reach customers via text, voicemail and email in the event of an emergency or planned maintenance. Given the relative size of Abenaki and NESC, many other processes are handled manually.
- f. Aquarion utilizes SAP to manage all finance, customers service, and field operations. This centralized system ensures that customer service representatives have a complete view of a customer's information and status, allowing for faster resolution to questions or service issues. In addition to e-billing, online bill payment options and payment by phone, Aquarion has also recently implemented "chat" functionality on it's website giving customers an additional channel to interact with the customer service representatives. Aquarion's integrated technology platform (phones, customer relationship management system, and website) has been instrumental in the attainment of Aquarion's JD Powers ratings of #2 in the North East Mid Size Utility group.