Administrative Policy

Title: Customer Support and Assistance Policy				
Administered By: Department of Water & Power				
New Policy No.	Issue Date (Last Revised)	Renumber Date	Department Head Approved	City Manager Approved
03600.006	04-22-13 (N/A)	01-03-17		

This Policy had been issued without a known Policy Number. Effective on the Renumber Date noted above, this Policy is hereby renumbered as the Policy Number noted above.

The latest version of the Policy is attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference.

Attachment: Policy (UNKNOWN #)
Issued: 04-22-13
Revised: N/A

DEPARTMENT POLICY

SUBJECT: Customer Support and Assistance Policy				Page 1 of 11
Section:	Position:	Issue Date:	Revision Date:	Supervisor Approval:
All Department	All positions	4/22/2013		General Manager

Purpose and Objective: To define the manner in which the City of Corona Department of Water & Power (Department) is to conduct business with its customers. The Department's primary purpose is to be helpful and courteous, and serve our customers' needs with professionalism and respect. The Department provides safe and reliable potable water service, efficient water reclamation, cost-effective electric service and high-quality reclaimed water.

The Department is here to serve the community by assisting customers and providing the highest quality service to all customers, ensuring all of their concerns are addressed. Items are addressed for the customer so they have confidence in the service and organization.

Guiding Principles: To be flexible, professional, proactive and courteous in all customer contact. The Department will utilize flexibility to assist the customer. Each customer is treated with respect and courtesy, and their situation is treated with sensitivity and confidentiality. A customer has one point of contact, and that employee has ownership and responsibility for the situation. We exist to serve the customer.

Customers Requesting a Manager or Supervisor.

Any customer that requests to speak with a manager or supervisor will get to do so. Even if the direct supervisor is not currently available, the proper response to the customer will be to please hold/wait one moment while the supervisor is located. If the immediate supervisor or manager cannot be reached at their desk or cell phone, the employee will call another supervisor or manager until they are able to reach a supervisor or manager to address the issue for the customer.

Directing Issues to Other Departments.

At times there may be a need to have a customer's issue resolved by another department. When this occurs please use the following methods to document and transfer the issue:

- Never tell the customer "that's not our issue" or that they have to contact the other department.

- Always inform the customer that you will give their information to the appropriate department and will follow-up with them to let them know what the next step(s) taken will be.
- Determine the appropriate department responsible. If unsure of where to direct the customer:
  - Check the InfoWeb Phone Directory, under "References to City Services."
  - Check the City's website at www.discovercorona.com.
  - If still unsure, check with your supervisor for further direction.
- Once the appropriate department has been determined, provide the following customer information to the receiving department:
  - First and last name
  - Preferred call back number
  - E-mail address (if available)
  - The date the issue was first reported to you.
  - A brief description of what the issue is.
- The preferred method to transfer the issue is to speak with the receiving department by phone or send an e-mail.
  - Issues for the Public Works Department can also be submitted using Crossbow through the City's website by going to www.discovercorona.com, then clicking on the Quick Links tab and then "Service Requests."
  - Issues for Public Works and other departments can also be reported via the www.seeclickfix.com/corona website.
- Document the system (work order, Customer Information System (CIS), Crossbow, EAM, etc.) used wherever possible to note who you spoke with regarding the issue from the other department.
- Call the customer back to let them know that they should be receiving a phone call or contact from the department and give the customer your direct line to contact you just in case they do not hear from the other department, have any issues or would like to follow-up.If you receive a phone call from the customer stating that they did not receive a call, contact the appropriate department again and bring the issue to your supervisor's or manager's attention.

Utility Billing/Customer Service

Fees, Deposits and Arrangements: Delinquent charges, final notice, shut off, after hours and deposits are charges used to act as deterrents and/or security on an account; customers are encouraged to pay their utility bills on the due date scheduled in order to avoid being assessed any extra fees. One of the primary goals for Utility Billing is to ensure that payment is collected for services provided. Services provided include the monthly fixed charges and commodity charges for usage. Fees and deposits are a by-product of this process, but are not the primary purpose of collection activities.

As a provider of essential services, the Department understands that it has a responsibility to identify and assist customers that are finding it difficult to pay their utility bills. Adjustments to fees and deposits are made as a matter of customer courtesy and when it is in the best interest of the customer to help pay their utility bill. Adjustments will be made based on, but not limited to, a customer's financial hardship and length of time the customer has had an account with the City. Financial hardships can be short, medium or long-term. In all situations, the Department will work with the customer to find a plan that suits the customer's needs.

Payment Arrangements.

Customers that are having difficulty paying their bill can be granted payment arrangements. Arrangements are meant to be flexible and to help ensure that the customer can make regular utility bill payments and have protection from service disconnection.

- Arrangements can be made by any of the Customer Service Rep. (CSR) I/II/III positions at the request of the customer.
- As long as the customer is actively communicating and showing a desire to address their balance, payment arrangements will be accommodated and services will not be disconnected.
  - If the past due balance, excluding fees and penalties, exceeds three times the average bill (based on the fixed charges and Tiers 1 and 2), the customer will be notified of the intent to disconnect.
  - Notification will be in writing via notice.
- A payment plan will be developed for each customer based on their circumstances.
- At the time of the arrangement, the CSR I/II/III will examine the bills for the customer to ensure the customer's budget is correct and they are not over budget.
  - The CSR will go over the water budget with the customer to ensure that the budget factors, such number of persons per household and irrigable area, are correct for the customer.
  - A landscape check-up shall be offered for all customers making arrangements to help reduce water usage and keep utility bills low.
  - If a leak is discovered on site, arrangements will be made with the customer to help the customer make the repair and receive a corresponding variance adjustment to assist with the account balance.
  - Customers that are having difficulties due to a job loss or other such event will be offered a Lifeline Assistance application to receive reduced rates for service.
  - Customers struggling to pay their bill will not be charged the higher tiered rates; an adjustment will be made for water over the indoor budget to be billed at the Tier 2 (Outdoor) rate.

Fee Reversals.

Fees are meant to be a deterrent to paying late. Every CSR I/II/III has the authority and ability to reverse fees on an account in order to help a customer become current on their utility bill.

- When evaluating an account that is severely past due, the transactions should be exported into Excel, reviewed, sorted and totaled by category in order to get an overview of the account and the amount of money paid versus the total bill amounts.
- If the total amount of payments is found to be greater than the total of the bills and deposits, fees can be reversed to help bring the customer's account current.

Deposits.

Deposits will be assessed on a customer in the event the customer goes to disconnection two times for failure to pay.

- Every attempt needs to be made to work with the customer to make payment arrangements for the deposit to be paid.

- Arrangements can be extended out over the course of several months, as long as the customer is making payments on their current utility bill.

Service Disconnection.
A disconnection of service is the last resort. Service disconnections should occur only when a customer fails to communicate with the Department regarding payment arrangements on their account, and despite multiple attempts on the Department's behalf. The Department should reach out to customers in jeopardy of disconnection by mailing past due and final notices, leaving door tags, writing a letter and/or e-mail, and making a phone call to the numbers listed on the account to attempt to make arrangements.

High Usage and Leak Assistance.
In the event there is high usage or reports of a leak, the Department will work with the customer to find the source of the leak. This can include a site visit by staff and/or a leak detection service. This is at no cost to the customer. If the leak is on the customer's property and the customer does not have the financial means to make the repair, the Department will work with the customer to make the repair. This can include providing labor, materials or a low-interest payment plan to ensure the repairs are made in a timely manner and avoid any disruptions to service.

Water Resources Group

Scheduling Appointments.
One of the primary goals for the Water Resources group is to provide landscape check-ups and site visits in response to high bills.

Appointment scheduling is to be handled primarily by the Water Resources Aide. In the event the Water Resources Aide is unavailable, the Senior Water Resources Analyst and/or the Water Resources Interns may assist with scheduling.

An appointment should be scheduled for the customer during the initial phone call. If the request is received by an email or phone message, calls will be returned no later than the next business day. Three attempts will be made to contact the customer by phone to schedule an appointment. These calls should be made no less than once per week. If unable to reach the customer by phone after three attempts, a letter will be sent to the customer requesting that they contact us and the request will be closed. Before sending a letter, ensure all available phone numbers for that customer have been used to attempt to make contact.

Every effort will be made to schedule the customer's appointment within three (3) weeks from the date of the phone call. If the wait time for appointments exceeds 5 weeks, then the Water Resources group will meet to discuss options to shorten that lead time. If a customer has a dire situation that needs immediate assistance, accommodations will be made for the customer by sending a different technician or field staff.

Conducting Site Visits.

Always observe the following basic guidelines when conducting site visits:
- Be friendly and courteous to the customer at all times;
- Explain their water charges and water budget calculations as clearly as possible and be prepared by using a print out of the customer's water use profile;
- Evaluate their site and irrigation for concerns that might be causing high bills;

- Broken sprinklers, nozzles, pipes, drip tubing, and other irrigation components may be repaired during the site visit under the following conditions:
    - the cost is less than $100; or
    - the repair will take less than 1 hour to complete.
- Offer a follow up appointment if necessary to complete the repairs;
- Avoid entering a customer's home during a site visit;
- Avoid conducting site visits when a customer is not at home;
- Be sure to complete the site visit paperwork to the best of your ability so the customer has an accurate and complete report of what occurred; and
- If a customer is not home for their appointment or isn't coming to the door, call the customer at the phone number provided during scheduling. If they do not answer the phone or door, wait for 15 minutes and then leave a door tag to advise the customer to contact the office to reschedule.

Construction Maintenance

City Tree Roots.
If a City tree is causing an issue with a customer's water or sewer line, the Department will:

- Make contact with the resident and schedule a time to inspect.
- Make any necessary repairs to the irrigation system and water or sewer lateral line.
- Address the tree roots by having the Parks Department or a properly licensed contractor cut any necessary roots or remove the tree. The employee will contact the Parks Department or contractor; it will not be the responsibility of the customer to contact either.
- Provide a credit as necessary on the customer's water bill for water charged due to the leak.

See the Department "City Tree Roots" procedures for detailed procedures.

Sewer Back-ups.
If a customer is having issues with their sewer backing up or other odor issue, the Department will:

- Make contact with the customer and schedule a convenient time to meet the customer at their location.
- Inspect the sewer line to try to diagnose the issue.
- If the cause can't be determined by the employee, the Department will utilize the services of a contractor, at no cost to the customer, to video the sewer line to diagnose the issue.
- If a City tree is causing an issue, the Department will make any necessary repairs to the sewer lateral and address the tree roots by contacting the Parks Department or licensed contractor; it will not be the responsibility of the customer to contact either.
- If the issue is not due to a City tree, the Department employee will provide a rough cost estimate to the customer regarding the repair, and/or provide information to the customer to avoid the situation from occurring again (i.e. information on fats, oils and grease, or FOG).
- If the customer cannot afford to make the repairs, the Department will make the repairs or have the repairs made by contractor and work with the customer on a low-interest payment plan in order to ensure the sewer line is put back into service as soon as possible.

Operations

Water Quality Calls/Concerns.
Water Quality complaints are very important; every effort should be made to resolve each complaint. Department employees must always:

- Listen and show they really care about the problem.
- Demonstrate they are knowledgeable about and in control of the situation.
- Thoroughly investigate the problem.

Always observe the following basic guidelines:

- Do not argue with the customer.
- Be friendly and courteous at all times.
- Assure the customer that reporting the issue is the correct thing to do.
- Listen carefully and calmly to the customer's description of the problem.
- When discussing the problem with the customer, use non-technical language and layman's terms as much as possible to help the customer understand the issue and solution.
- Assure the customer the problem was or will be resolved.
- Avoid making promises and/or commitments, but ensure the customer you will notify the proper individual or authority and a solution will be found. Follow up as necessary with anyone that you referred the problem to in order to ensure the problem was resolved.
- If the customer is considering making a claim for damages, tell the customer to contact the City Clerk's office. No inference should be made that the Department is responsible.
- Avoid entering the customer's home unless necessary. Prior to entering, ensure your shoes/boots are clean and free from debris.
- Ask the customer to put a sample of water in a clear container to have as you discuss the issue with them.

Handling Complaints by Phone.
A telephone call is usually the first way to communicate with a customer. Make every effort to resolve the issue over the phone to help satisfy the customer immediately, but do not try to avoid a site visit if that's what the customer desires. After introductions, ask a few questions to help diagnose the issue:

- What is the issue?
- Where is the issue occurring?
- How long have you had this issue?
- Do neighbors have the same issue?

After the issue has been described, ask follow-up questions to make certain the issue is understood. Make every effort to give the customer an immediate, clear and accurate answer. If a resolution cannot be achieved over the phone, schedule a visit to the residence or commercial location as soon as possible. Ensure you confirm the time and place with the customer. Before going to the customer's location, prepare yourself with information about the area, such as:

- Chlorine residuals
- Elevations of reservoirs in the zone

- Elevations of the customer’s location
- If necessary, know other constituent levels such as:
    - pH;
    - hardness; and
    - temperature.
- Always try to perform as many on site tests as possible and have a clear container on hand for visual inspection of the water.

Common Complaints.
These major categories describe the vast majority of customer complaints about water quality. Be familiar with each issue and the possible causes:
- Air in the water and/or milky water
- Discolored and/or colored water
- Particles in the water
- Tastes and odors
- Hard water, scale and spots on glassware
- Low and high pressure

Air or Milky Water.
Air bubbles may be present in water after there has been a line break or after a main has been drained. Water absorbs more air at higher water pressures; for each increase of 10 psi the water’s ability to absorb air is increased by a factor of one. For example, 40 psi will allow the water to absorb four (4) times as much air than if it was at atmospheric pressure. And water at 70 psi will absorb seven (7) times as much air. A reduction in pressure, such as pouring water into a glass, reduces the water pressure to atmospheric pressure and releases the air bubbles in the water. This release of air gives the water a milky appearance. Additionally, colder water can retain greater amounts of air in solution that warm water. Water at normal atmospheric pressure and a temperature of 40^{o}F can retain 60% more air than water at 80^{o}F.

It is usually possible to resolve the problem of air in the water or milky water by asking the customer a few questions:
- Does the air or milky water appearance disappear from the water when the glass of water stands for several minutes?
- Was the customer’s water supply shut off just prior to notice of the milky appearance?
    - If the answer is yes, air has probably entered the water system mains or the customer’s household plumbing. Advise the customer to flush their lines and the situation should resolve itself in time.
    - If the answer is no, the shutdown of a water main in a remote section of the system could still be the cause; it may have permitted air to enter the water mains and travel through the system. Check with Maintenance to see if there were any repairs performed in the area. The customer should be advised to flush their lines and the situation will resolve itself in time.

Field Investigation.
- Once at the customer’s premises, fill a glass container.
- If the cause of the air is unknown, it can be relieved by flushing a nearby hydrant or blow off (preferably at an elevation higher than the customer’s premises).

- While flushing hydrants to alleviate air, do not use high flow. Flushing at high flows could stir up sediment and particles, causing further issues during the investigation. This type of flushing should be referred to as rinsing due to its lower flows.

A customer complaining of air in the water or milky water may be concerned whether the water is safe to drink. Air does not pose any health risk and is safe to drink, so assure the customer the water is safe to drink.

<u>Discolored Water, Colored Water, Particles in the Water, Staining</u>.

Customers may complain about the water's appearance, stating it is dirty, turbid, muddy, rusty, colored, or it contains sand, foreign materials or particles. Common causes of these issues could be:

Cause	**Reason**	**Solution**
Hot water tank	Hot water tank is old or needs to be flushed.	Provide the customer with guidelines for how to flush their hot water tank.
Lack of use	Customer may have been away from their home for an extended period of time, on vacation, etc.	Advise the customer to flush all the lines on their premises by turning on their faucets, hose bibs, etc.
A customer's plumbing fixture(s) or home water treatment device	Defective fixtures, such as rubber particles from gaskets and seals; installation of black iron pipe can cause rusty water; connection of dissimilar metals; corrosion of copper piping can cause green or blue colored water or stains; home treatment devices, such as ion-exchange water softeners, can introduce materials from the device into the customer's plumbing, such as resin beads.	Ask the customer to bypass the device to see if the problem clears up.
Water main break; fire hydrant activity or flushing; dead ends in the system; new, replaced or recoated tanks, reservoirs, mains, service tanks, or other apparatus	May introduce outside materials into the system or stir up materials already in the system	Inform the customer there was a main break or flushing in the area, assure them the issue will resolve itself shortly and ask the customer to flush their system. The customer should avoid using their clothes washer or hot water to avoid pulling any sediment into the hot water tank. Explain that although the water may not be esthetically pleasing it is safe to drink after the issue clears.

Always start the investigation by asking the proper questions, either over the phone or in person:

- Where on the premises is the dirty water?
- When was the dirty water first detected?

- Does the customer remember seeing any work crews, including but not limited to fire engines, fire hydrant flushing or maintenance to any water systems or apparatus?
- What does the water look like?
- What color does it appear to be?
- Are both the cold and hot water affected?
- Are the particles large, small or colored?
- When did the customer first notice the staining?
- What color is the staining?

If only one complaint is received in the area, it is likely that the issue is originating on the customer's premises.

Field Investigation.

- If you are unable to confirm any field work explaining the issue, go to the field for investigation to determine if there was any work performed in the area, such as flushing, mainline maintenance, or mainline shutdowns.
- Ask the customer to collect a sample of the discolored water or particles. Often times the issue is resolved before a field investigation takes place.
- If the problem is still present, collect a sample and attempt to determine the origin of the issue.
- If the cause of the issue can be determined, explain the cause to the customer so they understand what occurred and what steps they need to take, if any.

Taste and odors.

Typically taste and odor issues are generally reported as a sewer smell coming from the sink while filling a glass of water, doing dishes or washing hands. Probable causes are rancid or clogged P-traps, accumulation of biofilm in the customer's hot water tank and improper temperature settings. Customers may also complain of a chlorine smell in the water.

Questions to ask:

- Where do you notice the smell?
- When do you notice the smell?
- Does the smell only originate from the hot water?

Solutions.

- If the customer complains of the foul sewer odor, suggest cleaning P-traps, flushing the hot water tank, and/or adjusting the temperature setting on the hot water heater.
- If the temperature is set too low on the hot water heater, it may cause the growth of biofilm in the customer's hot water tank.
- If the customer is concerned with a chlorine smell, be sure to pull a chlorine residual and ensure the customer it is within the City's goal of 0.70 mg/l to 2.5 mg/l.

Field Investigation.

- It is usually necessary to go into the field to investigate these issues.
- Narrow down the location of the smell.
- If the customer truly believes the water is causing the smell, fill a glass at the location and remove the glass from the area and check for the odor.

- Provide the customer with hot water tank flushing procedure if necessary.

Hard water, scale and/or spots.
Customers may complain that large amounts of soap are required to produce a good lather, that water is causing scale on cooking utensils and glassware and/or a film is present. Additionally spots and/or rings are more noticeable on fixtures that come in contact with water. Generally all of the water within the City is slightly hard. Hardness is caused by calcium and magnesium ions that occur naturally in water, when rain and/or snow come in contact with the earth and soluble minerals present in the earth's crust are dissolved and go into solution to make the water hard. The more calcium and magnesium present the greater the hardness. Most of the calcium and magnesium present in our water is from groundwater wells and Colorado River water. Hardness does not have a maximum contaminant level regulated by the State of California, nor has a public health goal been set. Softening treatment plants are costly to construct and operate. A customer who desires water of a minimal hardness may install a water softening system in their home. The City does not provide these systems or compensation for the operation or maintenance of the system. Advise the customer that soft water tends to be more corrosive than water with some hardness, and may even cause corrosion to household plumbing systems. Corrosion may also potentially increase the lead and copper content of the water in the customer's home. Be sure to inform the customer that the water is safe to drink regardless of its hardness level.

In some cases it is necessary to present the customer with further assurance that the water is safe. Inform the customer the water supply is under the jurisdiction of the State Department of Public Health and the water meets all standards. Multiple samples are taken daily from designated sample locations for bacteriological and chemical analysis. Provide the customer with a copy of the current Consumer Confidence Report.

Water Pressure Issues.
The City has six separate pressure zones. Within these zones there are sub-zones for each of our hydro-pneumatic stations. These stations are:

- Aquino
- Harlin Hills
- Kraft Ranch
- Mabey Canyon
- Montana Ranch
- Morita

Before responding to a pressure related issue, familiarize yourself with where the customer resides in their pressure zone. Utilizing the water atlas or the City GIS Infrastructure program, collect a rough estimate of the customer's elevation and the nearest elevation of a reservoir or discharge pressure of the hydro station in their area. This information will enable you to calculate the customer's pressure.

Handling Pressure Complaints by Phone:
A telephone call is usually the first way to communicate with a customer. At this point you should be familiar with the customer's area and the pressure they should be supplied with. Make an effort to resolve the issue over the phone, to help satisfy the customer immediately.

However, if the customer requests a site visit, make arrangements to meet the customer. After introductions, ask a few questions:

- How long has the pressure been low?
- When did you notice a change in pressure?
- Is the pressure low throughout the house?
- Where in the house is the pressure low?
- Have there been any repairs or maintenance performed on the plumbing system?

After the issue has been described, ask any necessary questions to make certain the issue is understood. Make every effort to give the customer an immediate, clear and accurate answer. If a resolution cannot be attained over the phone, schedule a visit to the residence or commercial location as soon as possible. Ensure you confirm the time and place with the customer. If the customer states the pressure has always been low, they may be located at the top of a pressure zone. If the customer noticed a recent change in pressure it could be due to repairs, maintenance, or failure of a pressure regulator. A field investigation is usually necessary to determine if the customer has a pressure regulator.

Field Investigation:

If field investigation is necessary follow the following guidelines:

- Collect a pressure reading at both the nearest hydrant and at the customer's spigot.
- Generally if the hydrant pressure is normal and the customer's pressure is low, then the issue resides on the customer's premises.
- If the regulator is suspected to be the cause of low pressure, a flow test will usually determine this. To conduct a flow test:
    - Take the static pressure while the pressure gauge is connected to the customer's spigot.
    - Open the valve, turn water on at the spigot, and take the dynamic pressure.
    - If the pressure drops significantly, the regulator is the probable cause.
- If the customer has had recent maintenance or repairs done, the likely problem could be a failed gate valve or clogged line.
    - Advise the customer on which action he or she may take.

Support Services

Vendor Interaction.

We rely on our vendors to provide us with quality materials, equipment and services. They rely on timely payments to maintain their operations and to continue to provide us with the type of service we need. There will be times that invoices are being reviewed to ensure that DWP has received the service or materials ordered to satisfaction before payment is approved by the division. In order to maintain a good relationship with the vendor, good communication and prompt response is necessary.

- If a vendor calls or emails for payment status, a response must be given to the vendor within 24 hours of original contact.
- If payment status is being researched and response will take longer than 24 hours, the vendor must be informed of the situation within the 24 hours and include a timeframe in which a final response to their inquiry will be provided.

- Any payment issues that you cannot resolve directly with the vendor must be brought to the Business Supervisor’s attention.

Bottle Water Requests.

The public contacts the Department regarding bottled water donation requests and status. Calls should be routed to the Support Services Technician handling this program. If the technician is not available, please follow these steps:

- Please let the customer know that you will check on the status of their order and call them back with confirmation of their order.
- In order to research the status they need to provide:
  - Name of the person that placed the order
  - Call back number
  - Name of the organization and the event
  - Date and time of the event
  - Requested pick-up date and time
  - Quantity requested
  - Date request was submitted
  - Method request was submitted, either online or via email
- The Support Services Technician will look in the Access database to see if the request was processed.
- If the request was not found in the database, they will proceed to process the order.
- If the request is found in the database, they will contact the requestor and provide them with the order confirmation number as well as the instructions to pick up their order.
- Any requests that require exceptions must be brought to the Business Supervisor’s attention.