

Did you know? Important Water Affordability Issues, facts and figures:

- 1. Poverty.** 67% of the households in Detroit do not have income sufficient to meet their basic needs, including paying their water bills. Detroit families in the bottom income quintile are putting ten percent of their income toward water bills, typically more than \$1,000 annually, according to a recent report.
- 2. Unaffordable bills.** Over the past 5 years water bills have increased 40% in Detroit. 45% of the city struggles to pay its water bills. It's more than a late payment problem, there are broader, systemic issues. A recent University of Michigan study found that the average tri-county low income household pays 10% of its income for water and sewerage. Detroit disconnects homes that are at least \$150 and 60 days overdue. Taps are reconnected once residents pay a portion of the delinquency (10 percent for first offenses, up to 50 percent for subsequent ones). In most cases, that's in a few days (ten days on average), but can extend for weeks and even months.
- 3. Water affordability plan.** Per economist Roger Colton, affordable water bills bring in more revenue. A higher percentage of people paying less expensive bills will bring in more total dollars than a lower number of people paying more expensive bills, especially since lower bills would result in no collection or shutoff costs. Ensuring that customers pay no more than 3% of their total income for water and sewer bills would bring more revenue into DWSD (Detroit Water and Sewerage Department) coffers.
- 4. Discrimination.** Low income residential customers are disproportionately targeted for shut-offs while non-profit churches and commercial customers are often allowed to dispute and delay payment on their bills without shutoff.
- 5. Extent of the problem.** As of October, 2019, more than 1500 residences were without water, as Bridge Magazine reported. So far this year one in 10 residential customers lost service, at least temporarily, in Detroit. Over the last five-years the DWSD has shut the taps to more than 112,000 homes. Shut-offs per year: **2014:33,000 2015:23,200 2016: 27,552 2017: 17,665 2018: 11,422** (through August).
6. Researchers from the Henry Ford Health System Global Health Initiative and Division of Infectious Diseases found a significant connection between water shutoffs and **water related illnesses**. A patient with a water-born illness was 150% more likely to come from a block where shutoffs had occurred.
7. Southeast Michigan is experiencing an unprecedented epidemic of **Hepatitis A**. A connection has not been proven, but as low-income people, working in food service, lose access to tap water in their homes, the risk to the greater population increases.
- 8. Vulnerable households.** DWSD does not check who lives in homes before ordering a water shutoff, so water is often shut off to the ill, disabled, elderly, or families with babies and children.
- 9. Contamination of pipes.** When residential water is stopped, plumbing is more susceptible to decay and contaminants like lead and copper, threatening the health of that household and adjacent homes.
- 10. Human Rights Violations.** In 2014, when water shutoffs began, two UN special Rapporteurs came to Detroit and affirmed that the right to water was being denied by the city. This is in violation of international human rights laws established by the UN in 2010.
- 11. Criminalization.** Consumers who illegally reconnect their water can be charged with a felony and be imprisoned for up to 5 years.
12. This year, the city sent notices to 25,000 customers **warning of shutoffs** and more than half avoided disconnections through payment plans or assistance efforts.

For more information go to:

1. <https://poverty.umich.edu/research-publications/policy-briefs/household-water-security-in-metropolitan-detroit-measuring-the-affordability-gap/> (U of M Study)
2. Mapping the Water Crisis: The Dismantling of African-American Neighborhoods in Detroit: Vol 1 (We the People of Detroit Research Collective, 2016)
3. Three Waterborne Outbreaks in Detroit (2016, 2017) by George Gaines, MSW, MPH
4. Detroit shut water to 1 in 10 homes this year. Yes, that's progress. JOEL KURTH & BRIDGE MAGAZINE & DETROIT JOURNALISM COOPERATIVE • DEC 5, 2017 11/13/18/BR