



120Water™

Buffalo, NY Starts Successful Verification Program



Utility Recommends "Just Start Somewhere" and Improve as You Go.

Buffalo Water draws water primarily from Lake Erie for 275,000 residents through approximately 75,000 service line connections, some of which are more than 100 years old.

In 2021, the EPA announced the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR), a major update to the Lead and Copper Rule. By October 16, 2024, all public water systems must complete a lead service line (LSL) inventory that digitally documents the material of every service line in their systems – and a plan to maintain that inventory.

Verifying service line materials can be a daunting undertaking, especially when the system is old and the staff is small. Here's what Buffalo Water is doing.

Buffalo's Compliance Program and Challenges

As part of its lead and copper compliance program, Buffalo Water had long understood the value of converting paper records into searchable electronic data. In 2015, they started migrating service and tap card information into their underground asset management system. As is the case for most cities of Buffalo's age and size, updated customer and service line data has been a big challenge. Buffalo has grappled with missing data, hard-to-read handwritten records, weeding out vacant lots from data files and properly accounting for double service lines.



Being proactive on this front revealed early on their data gaps and established a digital home for the inventory, so that the utility could actively work toward an accurate, updated inventory that complies with state and federal requirements. While they didn't start with a perfect record-keeping system, they knew they just needed to jump in.



ROLL: A city campaign to replace, not repair, lead service lines using grant money

Buffalo Water ROLL (Replacing Old Lead Lines) launched in 2019 and established that LSLs and lines with lead connections would no longer be repaired. Instead, when such a line experienced a break or leak, Buffalo Water would replace the entire line for free, using state and federal grant money. This was a huge benefit to customers, because in Buffalo, customers own their service lines and the connections to the main, making them responsible for the cost of line replacement and street restoration, which could be as much as \$20,000.

Adding Testing Kit Requests to Buffalo's 311 Hotline

To identify more LSLs through water testing, Buffalo Water amplified its existing program in two ways. First, it enabled customers to request free testing kits through the city's 311 program, Buffalo's reporting hotline already familiar to residents. Second, the utility engaged the services of 120Water to take advantage of its expertise in LCRR compliance management and LSL inventories. With 120Water, Buffalo's testing program between customers, the utility and the testing labs was simplified and streamlined.



Capital Program: A Pilot Strategy for Replacing Service Lines When Replacing Mains

In a bold move, Buffalo Water decided to pilot a practice that whenever a water main is replaced, the utility would also replace LSLs connecting to that main. This allows the utility to replace LSLs when the cost of replacing the main is already covered under its capital budget (and the ground has already been excavated).

However, they needed to know in advance which service lines needed replacing, which required customers to inspect their own lines and fill out a survey. This step initially proved to be much harder than expected. Of 375 requests sent to customers affected by the first main line replacement in the pilot, only three were returned, showing that customers lacked trust, motivation or both.

Buffalo Water responded by increasing outreach and education with multiple notifications to affected customers, working with city council members and attending community meetings. After the revamped outreach plan, responses increased from three to 65 in the initial trial.

Key Takeaways



Build Trust
with customers



Just Start
somewhere

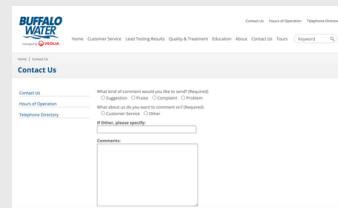
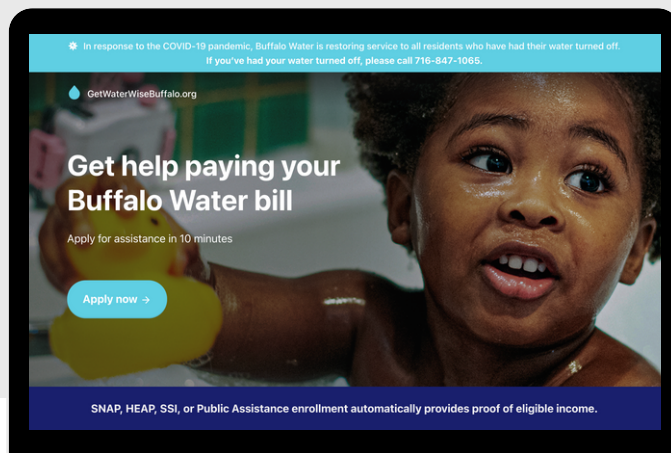
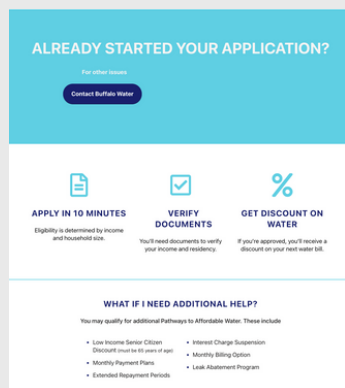


Collaborate
with stake holders



Think
like a customer





Get Water Wise: Digital Hub for LSLR Information and Affordable Water Program Assistance

Buffalo Water recently launched their Get Water Wise (GWW) initiative to build upon community engagement. This digital resource serves as an online hub for affordable water program assistance and LSLR information where customers can easily navigate and learn about their water and the available resources.

Buffalo Water established a social media management team to manage GWW's Facebook and Instagram accounts to support this program and develop engaging content communicating information about affordable water programs and their LSLR project. The team has also launched a social media ad campaign to raise awareness and drive people to the getwaterwisebuffalo.org website.

Much like their approach to building an inventory, the Buffalo Water team constantly builds upon this program to refine it. GWW recently added a calendar for on-site activations at local summer festivals as another channel to engage their community and share resources. The first on-site activation was at the city's Juneteenth Festival. Their tent had over 130 visitors who left with literature about their program and water initiatives.

On-site activations proved to be a great channel for customer engagement, showcasing the community's interest in learning about affordable water programs, lead service line information, and Buffalo's Water Plant. At the on-site tent, 28 people provided contact information to attend a free public water plant tour during the summer. In addition, 44 people provided their information to enter a raffle to win a free Galaxy tablet. Those that provided their contact information will receive Buffalo Water-related news through an upcoming Get Water Wise monthly newsletter. This is yet another valuable channel to keep their community engaged and up-to-date on their initiatives and water-related communications.

