



**YOUR WATER.**



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# People **BEHIND THE WATER**

## Meter Reader

For Doug Barrow, reading a customer's water meter is about much more than generating accurate bills. It's about building trust.

Each day, Barrow and his team of six Field Customer Service Representatives from Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, serving northwest Los Angeles County, walk from home-to-home, carefully recording meter reads into hand-held computers. If water usage has changed dramatically at a given site—either up or down—the computer beeps—and opportunity knocks.

"We investigate if there may be a problem, right there in the field," says Barrow, a 17-year veteran of the District. That means approaching the customer, explaining the unusual usage, and offering suggestions for possible causes, such as a stuck irrigation valve, broken sprinkler head, or leaky toilet. (A single leaking toilet can waste up to 200 gallons a day, a leaking valve even more. Often, a simple fix can lead to significant consumer savings.) Barrow says he wants to assure customers pay for what they are using, not what they are losing.

For Barrow, the greatest value in those one-on-one meetings with customers is in strengthening relationships. Every conversation prompted by an unusual meter reading is also a chance to listen to a consumer's comments and concerns. It's also an opportunity to inform a consumer about water quality, conservation tips, utility projects and other matters that increase understanding about the water system and the complexities of providing safe, reliable water—particularly in this arid region.

"We get great feedback from our customers about how they feel about our technical expertise, service, and communications. I think if we never interacted with customers and all they knew about us was the bill they get every other month, they wouldn't feel as comfortable with us or trust us as they do," he said.

"We're here for them, 24-7."



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