



3-24-2021

February 2021 Freeze FAQs

During the February 2021 freeze, why did MUDs lose water supply from the WHCRWA?

The West Harris County Regional Water Authority (WHCRWA) stopped providing water to its utility district customers during the February 2021 extreme weather event due to loss of its own water supply from the City of Houston.

Following the freeze that onset on Sunday, Feb. 14, water pressure began dropping as the flow of water from the City of Houston to the WHCRWA diminished. The WHCRWA Operators worked to contact the City of Houston to alert them, and the situation continued to worsen through Monday, Feb. 15.

On Tuesday morning, Feb. 16, the WHCRWA stopped receiving surface water supply from the City of Houston, impeding the WHCRWA's ability to provide water to its utility district customers. The WHCRWA sent notice of these emergency conditions to all utility district operators on Tuesday morning. At that point, WHCRWA limited surface water delivery to utility district customers with critical needs only; all other customers were requested to utilize their own water sources.

All WHCRWA utility district customers were impacted by the unprecedented weather event, and water supply was not restored by the City of Houston to the WHCRWA until the morning of Feb. 19. During this time, many were experiencing communication network failures throughout the region, and WHCRWA Operators utilized email, text message, and phone calls to maintain contact with its many utility district operators. The WHCRWA provided continuous press releases, mass emails, and web updates to provide information to the public and utility district customers throughout the extreme weather event.

How can I sign up to receive information and/or alerts from WHCRWA in the event of an emergency?

Emails: To sign up to receive informational emails directly from the WHCRWA, please visit www.whcrwa.com. A link to sign up for emails is available on the WHCRWA homepage.

Text messages: To sign up for text messages from the WHCRWA, you have two options:

- To sign up for WHCRWA News, Updates, and Emergency Alerts, text **WHCRWA** to **832-568-4675** from your mobile phone.
- To sign up for WHCRWA Emergency Alerts only, text **ALERTS** to **832-568-4675** from your mobile phone.

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3-24-2021

Why was the water supply shut off by the City of Houston to the WHCRWA?

It is understood that the City of Houston experienced major water supply issues due to extreme winter weather conditions associated with Winter Storm Uri. The WHCRWA currently receives its water supply from the City of Houston Acres Home Pump Station, and water supply from the City was disabled due to the impacts of this extreme weather event.

At this time, specific details related to the City of Houston's water supply infrastructure are unknown. The WHCRWA Board of Directors contacted the City of Houston directly regarding the loss of water supply; however, the WHCRWA is still awaiting a full explanation from the City.

The WHCRWA is taking measures to fully understand the events that led up to the critical infrastructure failure and mitigate for risks associated with future extreme weather events.

During the 2021 Freeze Event, did WHCRWA prioritize water supply services to utility district customers with critical water supply needs?

The WHCRWA prioritized service to MUDs with critical water needs while limited water supplies were available. Flow was greatly reduced to all other utility district customers to extend available surface water supplies for the districts with critical water needs as much as possible. The WHCRWA surface water reserves were quickly depleted after the City of Houston water supply was cut off on the morning of Feb. 16. Following the depletion of available water, the WHCRWA could no longer serve the supplemental water supply needs of its utility district customers. As soon as water supply services were restored on the morning of Feb. 19, the WHCRWA Operators worked to re-establish water distribution to MUDs with critical water needs as quickly as possible.

What actions are being taken by WHCRWA to reduce the risk of losing water supply in the future?

The WHCRWA has taken measures to strengthen service during extreme weather events. For example, the WHCRWA's emergency power facilities were maintained throughout the severe weather event. This means that the WHCRWA would have been able to continue to distribute water if water had been supplied by the City of Houston.

Additionally, the WHCRWA is taking steps to reduce the risk of losing water supply in the future by:

- Coordinating directly with the City of Houston to assess the events leading up to critical infrastructure failure



3-24-2021

- Continuing to survey infrastructure and making repairs to the WHCRWA system where necessary
- Assessing available data regarding the loss of water supply
- Reviewing and revising where necessary, the established emergency plans, including the WHCRWA Operator's Severe Weather Plan
- Developing long-term mitigation plans to address future extreme weather events
- Enhancing communication methods and measures with utility district customers
- Coordinating with the City of Houston and other Water Authorities in reviewing the Northeast Water Plant Expansion Project for design elements, resilience, and redundancy for operations in emergency conditions.

Was a risk assessment performed to determine the reliability of the WHCRWA's system, vulnerabilities, consequences of failure and any actions to mitigate these risks?

Yes, the WHCRWA conducts routine risk assessments to evaluate the reliability of its system, vulnerabilities, consequences of failure, and potential mitigation strategies. WHCRWA performs routine maintenance and testing of its system and maintains an Emergency Preparedness Plan with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Would WHCRWA consider drilling wells for emergency use for backup supply to MUDs with critical water supply needs?

The WHCRWA Board of Directors has initiated an investigation to consider the option of obtaining groundwater supplies to supplement their surface water delivery plans. There are various options to explore but no decisions have been made at this time.

The WHCRWA has always strongly encouraged MUDs to maintain additional water supply sources in the event of an emergency. WHCRWA urges Well Owners to maintain their wells, and MUDs should also have multiple interconnects, if possible, in the event that surface water is not available. The WHCRWA water supply is not intended to serve as the only water supply source.

When the new WHCRWA surface water supply expansion is complete, will the WHCRWA have part ownership in the City of Houston's Northeast Water Purification Plant facility? Will WHCRWA have the right to determine which of their customers will receive water through this?

The WHCRWA has a demand allocation in the City of Houston's water facilities by contract, but it does not own the City of Houston's facilities. The City of Houston is



3-24-2021

not able to guarantee pressure in all circumstances, and emergencies can occur that limit surface water delivery as recently experienced. The WHCRWA has always and will continue to work with all utility district customers to provide support. Utility districts with critical water supply needs have been identified, and water supply is prioritized to serve those without other water supply options.

During the freeze, many customers experienced water supply losses outside of their control. How is this being managed by the WHCRWA?

The WHCRWA Board of Directors understands that our region experienced an unprecedented winter freeze event in February 2021 and that many residents and other retail customers may have experienced significant water loss outside of their reasonable control due to frozen and burst pipes. In response, a number of retail water providers within the WHCRWA's boundaries are adopting leak adjustment policies to provide relief to their impacted customers.

To support the Retail Water Providers' leak adjustment policy efforts, the WHCRWA has adopted a [Resolution Adopting Policy and Procedures for the February 2021 Freeze Event Fee Adjustment Credits](#).

This Resolution carefully outlines the process the WHCRWA will utilize to issue credits to its Retail Water Providers, and all requests for fee adjustment credits should be submitted on or before July 1, 2021. For questions related to this WHCRWA fee credit application process, please contact Sanjay Bapat at sbapat@abhr.com.

Explain how the WHCRWA will recover credits issued to utility district customers through the "Resolution Adopting Policy and Procedures for February 2021 Freeze Event Fee Adjustment Credits." How will the WHCRWA be reimbursed?

At this time, WHCRWA is unaware of any funding source that would be available to reimburse WHCRWA for the credits it anticipates issuing in connection with the Resolution Adopting Policy and Procedures for February 2021 Freeze Event Fee Adjustment Credits. The credits issued would result in a slight decrease in the WHCRWA's operating revenues for the 2021 fiscal year.

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