

Water rates

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• Continue the water main replacement program in the Shavertown system.

• Wait until January 1, 1994 at the earliest to file for another rate increase.

"The rate calculations were based on a formula which included the company's rate of return on their investments, financial records, budget adjustments and quality of service," Ms. Pennington said. "Information from the public hearings also affected the decision. Although there were few formal, written complaints, there were many informal complaints."

Previously published reports in *The Dallas Post* indicate that the PUC had logged four formal written complaints and 103 informal complaints as of June 19.

Complaints included water that tasted of sulfur and residents near the Salla aeration tower in Shavertown intermittently smelling "rotten eggs," later determined to be hydrogen sulfide gas, that made some of them feel sick.

Mike Coyle, manager of the four area water companies, has maintained that the rate increases are necessary to finance badly needed system improvements, including drilling a new well for Harveys Lake customers and building the aeration tower to remove the sulfur smell from the water.

Recently he told a reporter that when General Waterworks purchased the water companies in 1990, they didn't even have a map of the water lines, which work crews still occasionally unearth as they replace old water mains.

Residential customers won't be the only ones feeling the crunch. Dallas Borough has paid \$2,065 this year for water used in its fire hydrants, according to borough clerk Barbara Zimmiski. A 62 percent increase would cost the financially-strapped borough \$3,346.13, or an extra \$1,280.30.

Several residents shopping at the Back Mountain Shopping

WATER COMPANY RATES				
Company	Old Rate	Original Request	New Rate	% Inc.
Dallas Water	\$276	\$544	\$446	62%
Shavertown	397	508	419	6%
Harveys Lake	131	475	262	100%
Noxen	237	383	313	32%

• Rates are for estimated average customer usage per year

Center Monday were aghast when they learned about the impending rate hike from a reporter.

"I won't be able to afford that," said Eleanor Dendlur, who has lived in the same home in Dallas for 45 years. "I'll have to sell my house. I've already applied for an apartment at the Hi-Meadows complex because my pension won't cover my expenses at home any more." Her Social Security cost-of-living increases are only three percent, or about \$5 a month.

"I feel like digging a well," said Jean Hazeltine of Dallas. "No one will like the increase. I'm retired - at least I can leave the area."

Tom Burkhardt, whose parents live in Dallas, can't figure out how the folks on fixed incomes make ends meet. "I don't like the increase at all," he said.

Joe Kuncic of College Manor said that he has "no personal complaints" with the water service, but knows that other areas have experienced problems.

Cable TV

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Borough, Harveys Lake and Dallas, Franklin, Lehman and Kingston townships, Zagorski said.

In addition, the system needed maintenance. And certain channels, such as TNT, ESPN and Arts and Entertainment, have drastically increased their fees to local cable companies, he said.

Tele-Media pays local municipalities franchise fees of three percent of the gross revenues generated by customers in each municipality.

For 1993, Dallas Borough anticipates receiving \$5,400 in franchise fees, while Kingston Township expects \$11,250. Figures from other municipalities were not available.

Each municipality has a separate franchise agreement, renegotiated when it runs out. Tele-Media is negotiating a 15-year agreement with Harveys Lake, whose franchise will end in September, 1993.

Even if higher rates mean more money for area municipalities, officials from two of them gave a

mixed response to the rate increase.

Dallas Borough manager Milt Lutsey declined comment but said that the rate increase was on the agenda for the December 15 borough council meeting, while Dallas Township supervisors Frank Wagner and Glen Howell said that they felt that the service was good. Wagner noted that several problems had been corrected and more cable added.

"My husband might want to have it taken out," said Jean Hazeltine of Dallas. "We don't watch it that much anyway."

"Ask them why we aren't getting the country music channel, CMT," said Diane Klem of Dallas, who also didn't like the rate increase.

"Every time I turn around, it's going up," said Eleanor Dendlur of Dallas, who lives on a fixed income.

Basic package could shrink to 12 channels

Zagorski said that once regulation takes effect, Tele-Media plans to offer a basic 12-channel package, consisting of local channels 16, 22, 28, 35, 44 and the Catholic channel, plus several New York City channels, for approximately \$15. Customers who stay with the present 33-channel basic service could lose several channels in the process. "It all depends on the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) interpretation of the Cable TV Act," Zagorski said.

"The problem with cable TV companies is that until now, there has been no competition and no regulation. It's the best of all business environments in which to operate," said Box, who feels that the quality of picture from Tele-Media isn't as good as that from other cable operators in the Wyoming Valley.

"If we find that they are abusing their right to raise rates as fast as possible before regulation takes effect, we will consider contacting the FCC," he continued. "After regulation comes down, we will take a good look at the township level to control rates and force them to provide a quality product."

911

(continued from page 1)

volumes of calls simultaneously for more than 40 local police departments and numerous fire and ambulance companies in locations scattered between Dallas Township and the Hazleton area.

He believes that regionalized communications centers similar to the one currently operating in the Back Mountain can deliver better service than a county-wide system because regional dispatchers and operators know their own geographical areas better.

Dallas Borough police chief Jack Fowler is concerned about equipment, communications with county police chiefs and the communication center's facilities, currently located in the basement of the courthouse alongside the Susquehanna River.

"Twenty years ago the emergency communications center was flooded out by Hurricane Agnes. It was never moved afterwards," Fowler said. "What will they do if we get another flood? Where will they move to?"

He added that Luzerne County Emergency Services Director David Macekura didn't notify him of a meeting scheduled for Friday, December 18, until a day after it was mentioned in a local newspaper. "I want to know about meetings before I read about them in the papers," he said.

Fowler said that when police chiefs meet with Macekura, he always promises to "get back to them" with answers to their questions, but never does.

Fowler noted that the county's current police communications system was "completely down" for several hours three times within the past two months. No radio. No computers. Nothing.

"What do they plan to use for a backup when they go down?" he asked.

Other concerns included areas where operating 911 systems overlap, such as in Franklin Township, where residents on 333 or 388 telephone exchanges have been hooked into Wyoming County's 911 system for several years.

Although Franklin Township residents on 675 telephone exchanges also dial 911, the call must be forwarded to Wyoming County, who then dispatches the necessary emergency personnel, according to assistant chief Howard Jones.

In another area where 911 systems overlap, Kunkle Fire Company serves Dallas Township in Luzerne County and Monroe Township in Wyoming County. Wyoming County currently routes calls from Monroe Township to the Back Mountain for Kunkle, according to assistant chief Karri Dodson.

Formed in 1970's, the Back Mountain Communications Center (nicknamed "Back Mountain Control") has been funded from the start by contributions from Nesbitt Hospital, six member communities and area fire and ambulance companies.

In May, 1992, Harveys Lake left Back Mountain Communications Center, leaving Dallas Borough and Lehman, Kingston, Dallas and Jackson Township as member municipalities.

When the county-wide system is ready to go on line, a special computerized hookup similar to residential "caller I.D." devices will link all communities into it. This system would work with

The county can charge each household \$1.25 a month for 3 years while it plans for 911

Commonwealth Telephone Company's network in the Back Mountain to route calls to the center, according to Bill Bader, manager of business marketing at Commonwealth.

Although Macekura was not available for comment, John Patton of the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs answered several questions about similar plans.

A new county-wide 911 system would be funded through a direct monthly \$1.25 surcharge on each resident's telephone bill, rather than by municipal contributions, Patton said.

Once the Department of Community Affairs approves Luzerne County's plan, the county could pass an ordinance mandating the monthly resident surcharge and would then be able to collect it.

Luzerne County would have up to three years from the date of the approval of its plan to purchase equipment, hire and train operators and go on line.

Since the county is providing the service for every resident, everyone must pay for it, Patton said.

During the first three years, Luzerne County could legally

collect the monthly residents' surcharges - even if no system is operating.

The county can drop the 911 system for any reason, any time before it begins operation and can legally keep all monies collected, Patton said.

The county commissioners would have the final say whether the county would keep the money to deposit into the general fund or return it to member municipalities, but not to the customers who originally paid it in, Patton said.

Box said that if Back Mountain residents still wanted their regional dispatching service, they would end up paying double for it: \$1.25 a month per household for the county's service and the present yearly fee from each municipality.

"We're at a disadvantage because we don't know the county's specific plans, how fast they're being developed and where they stand on our questions," Box concluded.



Good friends

Jennifer Zinn of Dallas let Santa in on her wishes for the big day. She visited him at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Shavertown last Saturday. (Post photo/Charlotte Bartizek)

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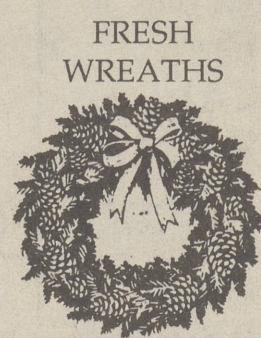


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