



Pipeline Express

Provide high-quality water and exceptional services to the people and communities we support.

Water Meter Registers: What do They do? Why are we Replacing Them?

By Steve Nystrom



As we move into the winter season, the register replacement project continues to be one of the most important efforts happening at Saint Paul Regional Water Services. Even if you don't work directly with meters or billing, this project affects the entire organization. It helps us keep our water system reliable, protects our revenue, and provides steady work for our staff during the months when outdoor field work slows down.

What is a register and why replace it?

A meter register is the part of the water meter that records how much water a customer uses. Over time, with aging batteries and normal wear and tear, registers eventually become less accurate. That means we may lose revenue, and we can no longer be confident that the bill is accurate. Most registers last about 15 years, and many of the ones in the field today are reaching that limit.

Extra Help for the Winter

To meet this year's goals, we are bringing in eight additional employees from our trainee program and distribution division to help the meter shop this winter. From December 2025 to March 2026, their work will help us replace about 7,000 registers. While we replace registers year-round, winter gives us an ideal time for a big push. Cold weather slows down many types of field work, and this project helps

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Meter Registers: Why we are Replacing Them

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reduce the number of seasonal layoffs by giving staff important work they can do indoors. It's a practical way to keep our workforce stable and productive all year long.

Why we replace registers a few at a time

We have about 95,000 registers system wide. Replacing them all in one large project might sound more efficient, but it would create big problems later. If every register were new at the same time, they would also all reach the end of their lifespan at the same time, causing thousands of failures in one short period. Instead, replacing registers in steady, manageable batches spreads out their life cycles. This makes planning easier, avoids sudden budget impacts, and helps keep our system running smoothly.

Preparing for the future: AMI by 2030

These replacements also move us toward one of our major long-term goals: implementing Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI) by 2030. AMI will allow us to read meters remotely, detect leaks more

quickly, improve billing accuracy, and reduce the time and labor required for manual meter reading. The registers we are installing today are a necessary step toward making AMI possible.

Why accurate meter readings matter for everyone

SPRWS operates on revenue from water sales, not taxes. That means every gallon of water that flows through the system must be measured correctly to ensure fair billing. When a register is old or inaccurate, customers may be billed incorrectly, and the utility may lose revenue needed to maintain operations.

Accurate reads support fairness, financial stability, and the health of the entire water system.

The register replacement project is not just a technical task, it is an investment in our employees, our customers, and our future.

Thank you to all the employees whose work keeps this project moving forward.

NEW ELECTRICIAN

Nels Raabolle is the new electrician at water



Nels Raabolle

By Sandy Kimbrough

We're excited to welcome Nels Raabolle to our team! Nels brings valuable experience from his time with the Anoka-Hennepin School District and the Metropolitan Council. Outside of work, he enjoys golfing and traveling—having explored Italy, Spain, France, and Switzerland, with hopes to visit Sweden and Norway next. A proud Minnesota sports fan, Nels cheers on both the Timberwolves and the Twins. He's happy to be here, and we're just as happy to have him!



Cloudy Water: What Causes it?

Have you ever poured a glass of tap water on a cold winter morning and noticed it looks milky or white for a few seconds before clearing up?

Good news: that cloudy appearance is just tiny air bubbles, not a water quality problem. In fact, it's a normal seasonal effect that happens more often when the temperatures drop.

Cold Water Holds More Air

During the winter, groundwater and distribution pipes get colder.

Cold water naturally holds more dissolved air than warm water the same way a cold bottle of soda stays fizzy longer than one left out on the counter.

As that cold water travels through the mains into your home, it becomes pressurized. More pressure means dissolved air.

When It Comes Out of the Tap, Pressure Drops

The moment water leaves the faucet, the pressure is released and all that extra dissolved air rapidly

escapes as tiny bubbles.

Instead of rising immediately to the top (like soda bubbles), they form throughout the water, scattering light and making the water look white or cloudy.

This is harmless and will quickly dissipate on its own if left out on the counter.

Cloudiness Disappears Quickly

If you set the glass down and watch closely, you'll notice:

- The water clears from the bottom up
- The bubbles rise to the surface
- Within 30–60 seconds, the water is crystal clear again

The Bottom Line

Cloudy water in winter is normal. It's caused by harmless trapped air. It clears on its own in seconds. Your water remains clean, safe, and fully treated all year round. So next time you see milky water on a cold day, you can tell our customers:



Don't worry, that's just winter air escaping. It's actually a sign of fresh, pressurized water coming through the system.

Retirees: Want to Keep Getting the Pipeline?

Retirees who want to continue to get the Pipeline Express in 2026 need to provide Jodi Wallin with their email address by sending that information to Jodi.Wallin@ci.stpaul.mn.us by January 16, 2026.

SPRWS Blood Drive Meets 100% of its Goal



Jodi Wallin gives blood during the Memorial Blood Center blood drive on Nov. 14 at the water utility. SPRWS met 100% of its goal and collected 25 units of blood.

The SPRWS blood drive met 100 percent of its goal to gather 25 units on November 14.

Those 25 units of blood will impact 75 lives in Minnesota and western Wisconsin, and are already out in the community helping those in need. Memorial Blood Centers provides blood to more than 60 hospitals and is Minnesota's leading supplier of blood. Thanks to all who gave blood.



Steve Schoenecker Retires After 18 Years of Service

Steve Schoenecker celebrated his last day in the office on Nov. 25 after serving Saint Paul Regional Water Services for 18 years.

Steve started work with the water utility on September 23, 2007, as a water plant worker, a position he held until he was promoted to maintenance worker in 2011. That position is now maintenance worker II, the position from which he retires.

We wish Steve well on his retirement!



Che Fei Chen presents Steve Schoenecker with his retirement plaque at a celebration in his honor on Nov. 25 in the plant lunch room. November 25 was Steve's last day at the utility after working here for 18 years.



Steve Schoenecker, foreground, cleans out flock 3 in 2008.