



The Value of Tap Water

**Our Most Vital Resource
is a True Bargain**

A thirst-quenching glass of water. A refreshing shower. The single most important ingredient for cooking our meals. Then, of course, there's irrigation for crops, hydroelectric power generation, industrial manufacturing, fire protection, waste disposal, recreation, and wildlife enhancement.

What's more basic to life than water? While water is so fundamentally valuable to us, we don't often stop to consider a simple fact: that regular tap water is a true bargain — even with increasing costs — especially compared to other everyday products or services.

Tap water costs less than a penny a gallon. Yet how many of us consider what it takes to treat and deliver safe and reliable water to homes and businesses across California every single day?

There is, for example, the challenge of meeting increasingly stringent drinking water regulations that can require new treatment technologies. There is the need to repair and upgrade aging pipelines, pumps, and other facilities, some more than 100 years old. And there is the rising cost of electricity to transport and treat the water. That's not to mention the cost of developing new supplies of water through recycling, desalination, and conservation that increase availability and reliability, or the millions of dollars it takes to contain the spread of non-native species — like quagga mussels that can clog and compromise pipelines and other water facilities.

What's more, consumers get more than just the molecules of water they drink and use. They're getting reliable services that include ongoing maintenance, sophisticated water quality testing and treatment, and highly trained personnel — a 24-hour-a-day system of people and equipment to maintain water supply safety and reliability.

“Simply put, Californians are getting a higher quality product along with more environmental protection as part of their water service. Even though costs are increasing, tap water is still very reasonable when you compare it to other common household products and services that we rely on everyday,” says Timothy Quinn, executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies, which represents more than 450 public water agencies.

The Best Deal Around

On average, a gallon of California tap water costs two-tenths of a cent. Compare this to the cost of other products and services we use every day.

A Gallon of Tap Water: \$0.002



Average Monthly Cost of Tap Water: \$53



What Drives Water Rates

Some of the factors affecting the cost of treating and delivering water:

- Rising treatment costs:** California tap water meets some of the most stringent water quality standards in the nation. Producing high-quality water requires significant investments in treatment technologies. In addition, new drinking water regulations continue to be established since new technology detects contaminants at extremely minute levels.
- Aging water infrastructure:** From treatment plants to pumping stations to local storage tanks to pipelines, much of the system that delivers water to Californians was built decades ago. Aging parts of that system must be upgraded, repaired or replaced to ensure reliable water deliveries for future residents and businesses. Capital expenses and debt service to fund those repairs and upgrades can account for a significant portion of monthly water bills.
- Increasing energy costs:** Electricity can account for a substantial portion of a local water agency's operating expenses. Water is a heavy substance that requires a great deal of energy to move from the source to the tap, which could require pumping it out of the ground, over mountains, and long distances. Energy is also used during the water treatment process to remove impurities.
- Investing in new supplies:** California's population continues to grow, but our statewide water supply system of canals, pipelines or other storage facilities has not been significantly expanded in more than three decades. Local water agencies have invested billions of dollars in local resource strategies, such as water recycling, groundwater storage, conservation and other projects, to stretch supplies and increase reliability. These strategies are much more expensive than sources we have relied on in the past and monthly water bills may reflect a share of the costs.
- Environmental protection and non-native species:** Perhaps the biggest cost driver today is taking care of the environment and protecting water systems from non-native species. Efforts by local agencies to help protect their distribution systems from the spread of debilitating non-native species such as quagga mussels have added another unforeseen cost, particularly over the past five years. Some agencies are now spending millions of dollars annually to contain the spread of some species that can clog and compromise pipelines and other water facilities.