

Halifax County Service Authority Hydrant Use Policy

Introduction and Authority

The Halifax County Service Authority (HCSA) owns, operates and maintains source water wells, surface water intakes, treatment facilities, waterlines, hydrants, valves, tanks and other appurtenances for the purpose of drinking water and fire protection of its water customers. The water systems operated and owned by HCSA are in the Towns of South Boston, Halifax, Virgilina, Virginia International Raceway and the Community of Clover. HCSA also owns and operates such systems within the County that are connected to such systems.

HCSA has the fiduciary and management responsibilities to provide safe and reliable drinking water to our water customers that is funded through customer rates and fees. Fire hydrants are drinking water access points for water quality, water testing and system maintenance. Drinking water is also used for local fire protection and to stabilize fire insurance policies and coverage. It should be noted that HCSA does NOT receive any funding or subsidies (other than rates or fees) to manage and maintain fire hydrants, system infrastructure from the localities and/or industries served. This burden is placed solely upon HCSA's water customers.

HCSA is regulated and audited by the Virginia Department of Health, Office of Drinking Water (VDHODW) for the sole purpose of providing safe and reliable drinking water. HCSA must report ALL water production, usage and loss to VDHODW. This includes water used by Fire Departments for fire protection and fire related services.

The Homeland Security Act (HSA) and related legislation, such as the Bioterrorism Act, mandate security enhancements for public water systems, information sharing, while protecting sensitive data from public release through the HSA's Critical Infrastructure Information (CII) provisions, balancing national security with transparency needs for public water access. These laws aim to make water systems resilient against terrorism and cyberattacks through monitoring and disclosures.

The granting of access to the County's local Emergency Network Platform(s) and software by designated HCSA staff, will automate the notifications of working fires, motor vehicle accidents and chemical releases to HCSA staff for active decisions. This will allow HCSA to monitor and to alert staff of potential system demand and additional system operations to assist in the protection and potential mediation of critical groundwater and surface water within the HCSA source water service areas. Notifications may be made by text or email to:

Mark Estes – 434.579.1356, mestes@hcsa.us

Bryant Francisco – 434.222.8197, bfrancisco@hcsa.us

HCSA Policies & Procedures

- **Authorization is Key:** Only authorized personnel (firefighters, police, or permitted individuals with written consent) can operate public hydrants.
- **Emergency Priority:** Firefighters use hydrants for extinguishment. HCSA may restrict other water uses if it hampers fire response.
- **Fire Departments:**
 - **Any Use of HCSA Water:** Fire departments that connect to and use HCSA water must meter, estimate and account for the amount of water used every month. This amount must be reported to HCSA staff electronically by email by hand delivery to the HCSA business offices located at 2529 Houghton Avenue in South Boston, VA 24592. Electronic delivery shall be made to the following email address: customerservice@hcsa.us.
- **Proper Tools:** Only special hydrant wrenches (or approved tools) shall be used to prevent hydrant damage.
- **Direction of Operation:** Hydrants typically open counter-clockwise ("Open-Left"), but some may open clockwise ("Open-Right"). Always follow the arrow stamped on the hydrant.
- **Shutoff & Drainage:** Hydrants must be fully closed and drained after use to prevent freezing, especially in cold weather. The water authority shall be notified of any hydrants used.
- **No Obstructions:** Keep hydrants clear of vehicles, materials, and anything that blocks access within a few feet.
- **Unauthorized Use Penalties:** Tampering or unauthorized drawing of water can result in fines, civil, or criminal penalties, as per local ordinances.

Non-Emergency Hydrant Use for Local Fire Departments

- Fire Department may fill their firefighting apparatus from HCSA hydrants in preparation for emergency use and/or training purposes only.
- The amount of water usage will be metered or estimated by the size of the tank on the pumper or tanker.
- The use of a hydrant will be reported to HCSA staff prior to withdrawal and/or within the following 24-hour period.

Hydrant Use Other Than Fire Department Use

- **Permits & Meters:** Requires applications, agreements, deposits, and often a hydrant meter to measure usage.
- **Written Agreements:** Formal written agreements with the water authority are essential for temporary water access.

- **Permit Requirements:** Any non-fire department entity (e.g., construction crews) wishing to use a hydrant must obtain a permit, use a metered backflow prevention device, and pay for the water used.
- **Designated Hydrant:** All water shall be drawn from the metered hydrant located at the Halifax County Service Authorities business office located at 2529 Houghton Avenue in South Boston Virginia. Hydrant access hours are between 8:30 am and 3:30 pm, unless prior authorization and arrangements have been made.
- **Theft and Penalties:** Unauthorized use of a hydrant is often prosecuted as theft or a misdemeanor, with fines frequently reaching \$500 per day.

Primary Access and Usage Rights

- **Exclusive Emergency Access:** Fire hydrants are typically designated for the exclusive use of the Fire Department during emergencies. No person may interfere with this use.
- **Non-Emergency Fire Department Use:** Fire departments may use hydrants for practice operations, drills, and system testing.
- **Incident Authority:** During a fire, the Fire Chief or incident commander has the authority to request HCSA to turn water on, off, or diverted as needed to fight the fire. The Fire Chief will then assume all liability for infrastructure damages, health related issues due to water quality and potential loss of service to HCSA customers during the fire incident control.

Operational Policies

- **Tool Requirements:** Only approved five-sided **hydrant wrenches** may be used to operate valves to prevent damaging the brass operating nut.
- **Water Hammer Prevention:** Hydrants must be opened and closed **slowly** (often defined as taking at least 60 seconds or counting between turns) to prevent "water hammer," which can burst water mains.
- **Full Opening:** Hydrants should generally be opened completely (typically 8–10 turns) to ensure the internal drain valve closes. Throttling a hydrant partially open can cause water to wash out the soil at the base of the hydrant.
- **Cold Weather Care:** After use, especially between October and April, hydrants must be pumped dry or checked to ensure the barrel is empty to prevent freezing. **Out of Service:** If a hydrant is inoperable, it must be reported immediately and marked (e.g., "bagged") so responders do not attempt to use it during an emergency.