



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

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SOFTENER SALT OPTIMIZATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is this Softener Salt Optimization Program necessary?

Your City of Waukesha Clean Water Plant is required by the State of Wisconsin to reduce chlorides, which can be harmful to fish and other aquatic life. Most of the chlorides come from water softener salt, which is discharged to the sanitary sewer and ends up at our treatment plant. Treatment plants are designed to remove solids and break down organic wastes, but chlorides cannot be removed by normal treatment processes. Therefore, each softener must be adjusted (optimized) to reach its maximum salt efficiency.

What do I need to do, and when?

Your softener must be adjusted (optimized) for salt efficiency by an approved optimizer. Residential softener owners will be contacted by the City starting in 2021. If you have a rental softener, your softener company will contact you. Commercial, industrial, and other high-volume water users will receive a letter between 2018 and 2020.

Who are the approved optimizers?

Technicians from local softening companies who have completed specialized training from the Water Quality Association. You can view the current list of approved optimizers on the Softener Salt Program web page, under Related Resources.

Who is running this Program?

Your Clean Water Plant is working with the Water Quality Association (www.wqa.org) and local water conditioning companies in a cooperative effort to reduce salt use. Certified technicians from these companies are performing the optimizations.

Is there a cost for the optimization?

The majority of the cost of the optimization is being shared between the City and local water conditioning companies. In addition, a nominal **copayment of \$10** per softener optimized is required to be paid by the softener owner at the time of the optimization.

What benefits could there be for me?

Optimizing salt use will ensure your softener uses only the salt needed, which reduces your salt costs and handling. Salt usage can be reduced by as much as 50% through softener optimization without any change in softened water quality.

Should I call and schedule my optimization early?

Please wait until you are contacted by the City (if you have a rental softener, you will be contacted by your softening company). This is a 5-year program, and there are close to 16,000 softeners to be optimized. Meanwhile, you can eliminate water leaks and reduce your demand for soft water.

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What will the technician be doing to my softener?

- Will check your current softener settings
- May change the hardness setting to match actual water conditions
- May change the salt injector size and salt dosage for maximum salt efficiency
- May adjust reserve capacity to reflect actual water usage
- May add a resin cleaner to help restore lost softening capacity
- Will place a sticker on your softener to indicate it has been optimized

The technician may also make recommendations for optional work that is NOT part of the Optimization Program such as replacing components, performing other maintenance, or replacing aging softeners.

How long will the optimization visit take?

About 30 minutes to an hour per water softener. This will vary based on the size and complexity of your water conditioning system.

Will this affect my water quality?

Your softened water quality should remain unchanged, although the softener is likely to regenerate somewhat more often if the salt dosage is reduced.

What about Lake Michigan water?

After Waukesha makes the transition to Lake Michigan water in 2023, for continued use, softeners will have to be adjusted to the reduced lake water hardness. This will further reduce the amount of salt used.

What if I'm going to be installing or replacing a softener?

City Code requires that all new or replacement softeners meet a minimum salt efficiency rating of at least 4,000 grains of hardness exchanged per pound of salt. Please check the product specifications before purchasing. And because factory settings may not match our program criteria, your new softener must still be optimized by one of the Program's technicians who is certified for your brand of softener. A plumbing permit is required for new softener installations.

What else can I do to reduce salt use?

- Fix any water leaks so you use less softened water. See EPA's Fix a Leak Week web page: www.epa.gov/watersense/fix-leak-week
- Replace a timer clock unit with a demand-initiated unit (the technician may recommend this)
- Reduce your demand for softened water by installing water-saving fixtures
- Consider modifying your plumbing to use hard water for outside hose bibs

What if I don't have a softener?

When you are contacted by the City, you will receive instructions on how to let us know.

What if I already participated in the 2016 softener checkup program?

Our program today is more robust, and is based on research and technical expertise from local water conditioning companies and the Water Quality Association. Therefore, your softener must still be optimized, but you will not be required to make the copayment.

What if I am not a City resident?

This program applies to all softeners that discharge to the Waukesha sewer system, including those in portions of Pewaukee, Wales, and the Town of Waukesha.

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