Virginia Association of Counties
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS
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SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact **Gage Harter**.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: **Chesterfield County**

Program Title: **Smart Meter Monitoring Information Campaign**

Program Category: **Communication**

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: **Daniel Winters**

Title: **Customer Operations Administrator**

Department: **Utilities**

Telephone: **804-748-1756**   Website: **chesterfiel.gov/utilities**

Email: **WintersD@chesterfield.gov**

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: **George Hayes**

Title: **Director of Utilities**

Signature:

2025 VACo Achievement Awards

Smart Meter Monitoring Information Campaign

I. Executive Summary

Introduction

Chesterfield County Utilities (CCU) launched a proactive customer engagement initiative to promote *EyeOnWater*, a smart water monitoring portal, following the completion of a county-wide upgrade to smart water meters. Serving over 124,000 accounts, CCU replaced manually read meters with smart technology, enabling remote readings, improved billing accuracy, and enhanced leak detection.
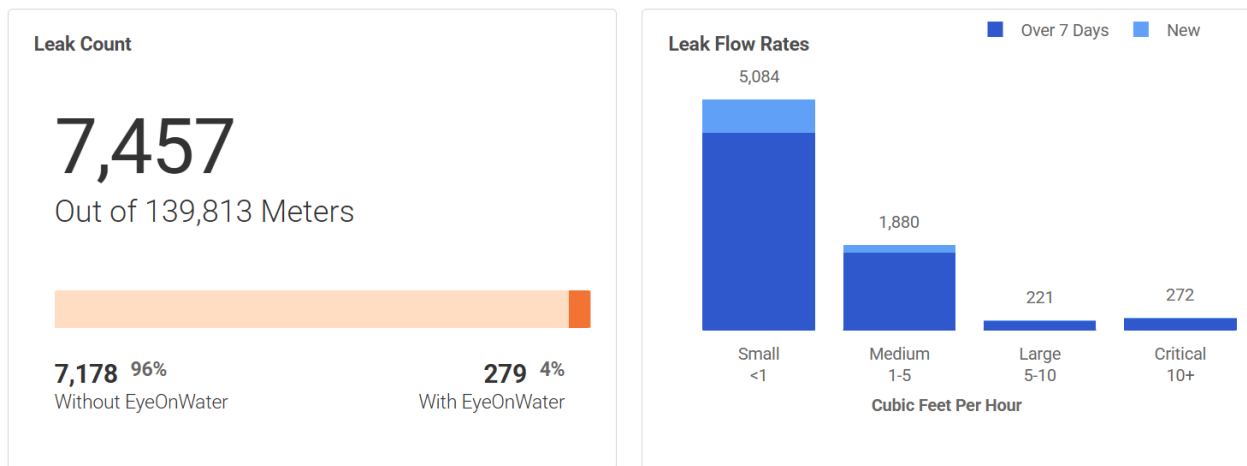
The EyeOnWater portal empowers customers to monitor their own water use, detect leaks early, and make informed decisions about consumption—helping reduce waste and utility costs. With over 7,400 accounts (5%) exhibiting signs of continuous water use, this tool supports CCU's commitment to excellent customer service, data-driven operations, and resource efficiency.

Results and Impact

To drive adoption across a diverse customer base, CCU implemented a multi-channel outreach campaign from August to December 2024. This approach prioritized both accessibility and customer preferences, ensuring that residents with varying levels of technological comfort could engage with the portal. The campaign resulted in a six-fold increase in portal enrollment, from under 1% to over 6% of account holders within six months. Customers reported early leak detections and better understanding of irrigation and appliance-related usage. Staff reported more productive, data-informed interactions with customers. The program directly supports CCU's goals of improving service, communication, and operational efficiency.

II.   Need and Context

CCU's goals include improved data, enhanced customer engagement, improved customer service, and demonstrating excellence in public service with a commitment to fiscal stewardship and the efficient use of resources. Data from the new smart meters shows more than 7,400 (5%) of the 139,813 meters have continuous usage over 24 hours, indicating a leak. Identifying and stopping leaks helps CCU reach our goals.

Leak Count

7,457

Out of 139,813 Meters

7,178 96%
Without EyeOnWater

279 4%
With EyeOnWater

Leak Flow Rates

■ Over 7 Days   ■ New

5,084

1,880

221

272

| Small <1 | Medium 1-5 | Large 5-10 | Critical 10+ |

Cubic Feet Per Hour

Our Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) review accounts with critical and large leaks and attempt to contact these customers to determine if there is a leak or a business reason for continuous usage. If a leak is identified, the CSRs inform the customer of EyeOnWater and encourage the customer to enroll. CSRs also work with the customer to adjust their bill(s) for a leak.

The EyeOnWater portal can help the department achieve its goals by notifying customers of leaks. CCU does not have sufficient staff to monitor and inform all customers of leaks. Making the customers **aware** of the new portal to increase usage is a challenge. The portal is easy to use and provides many benefits, but the department needed a way to effectively drive awareness of

the program and increase the adoption rate. The demographics of CCU's customers include a wide range of residents with varying levels of technical skills and willingness to use the technology available to them. Customers receive content in various ways, so CCU has tailored communication about EyeOnWater to match customers' preferences.

- Currently, 28% of CCU customers receive their bills electronically while 72% of our customers rely on the bill through the mail.

- Only 14% of payments are received by returning a bill in an envelope. The remaining customers use several different electronic methods to submit payments.

III.   Program Implementation

CCU leadership met with key county personnel to determine the most effective methods to communicate with residents. Several methods were implemented to communicate about the portal and its benefits including:

- Messaging on water bills mailed

- Informative video content on the county's social media

- Mass mailing of oversized postcards to all accounts

- New and existing customers are informed by word of mouth with CSRs.

- Email communication from CSRs

- Field Service representatives distribute informational cards to residents during visits.

Initial mass mailing: An oversized postcard was developed and mailed to every service address regardless of how they normally receive their bills. CCU selected the most cost-effective provider to assist with the mailing. Once the vendor was selected, a weekly list was provided for the vendor to print and mail the postcards. Mailings took place from August 2024 to December

2024, to allow for an anticipated correlation between program launch and anticipated customer calls. CSRs did not receive many calls regarding the cards, indicating that the message and directions for sign-up were clear and easy to follow. Approximately 5,000 customers signed up for the EyeOnWater portal due to this mass mailing.

Social media content was created in January 2025 with the help of the county's marketing professionals. After an initial spike in signups, there was a consistently higher number of monthly signups compared to the period before the postcard and social media campaigns.

The program is now in a maintenance phase. CSRs and field service workers continue to explain the portal to customers with new accounts. County social media sites and CCU's website will continue to feature promotional and video content about the portal. Mail inserts and mass emails will continue to go out to customers who are signed up for either method of billing.

IV.   Cost and Funding

In-house talent was utilized to design and produce printed materials and social media content at no additional cost. Training on fielding questions about the program was integrated as part of the staff's normal workload, incurring no additional expense. Printing and mailing the cards cost $.465 per card. The largest expense was for postage at $.38 per card. The cost could have been reduced by using a smaller postcard, but the oversized card was necessary to stand out from other direct marketing. The mass mailing approach was intended to reach everyone in the county before following up with a more targeted approach tailored to customers based on the different ways they consume content.

V.   Results and Impact

CCU has received several emails from customers expressing appreciation for the program. Many have shared their success with early leak detection, certain that the leaks would have continued undetected for an unknown amount of time without the portal. The tool saved them money and minimized the waste of a vital resource. Other impacts:

- Customers discovered leaks and faulty flappers in seldom-used bathrooms.

- Customers are seeing the impact of irrigation on their bills. Visual representation on their accounts helped customers see an opportunity to save money. Many people are visual learners and having visual data is a definite advantage.

- CSRs have received emails from customers expressing gratitude for the portal.

Examples of benefits from the utilities department perspective:

- More productive interactions with customers with visual representation of usage patterns/ leaks, etc.

- Customers call the department to inquire about usage patterns, potential leaks, etc.

- Having a larger percentage of our account holders actively monitoring their consumption provides CCU with additional resources to monitor and respond to situations quickly.

CCU identified a useful tool and increased the percentage of EyeOnWater users from under 1% of total accounts to over 6% within a 6-month period.

The program to increase awareness and drive signups for the EyeOnWater portal began in

August 2024. Total signups are represented graphically below:
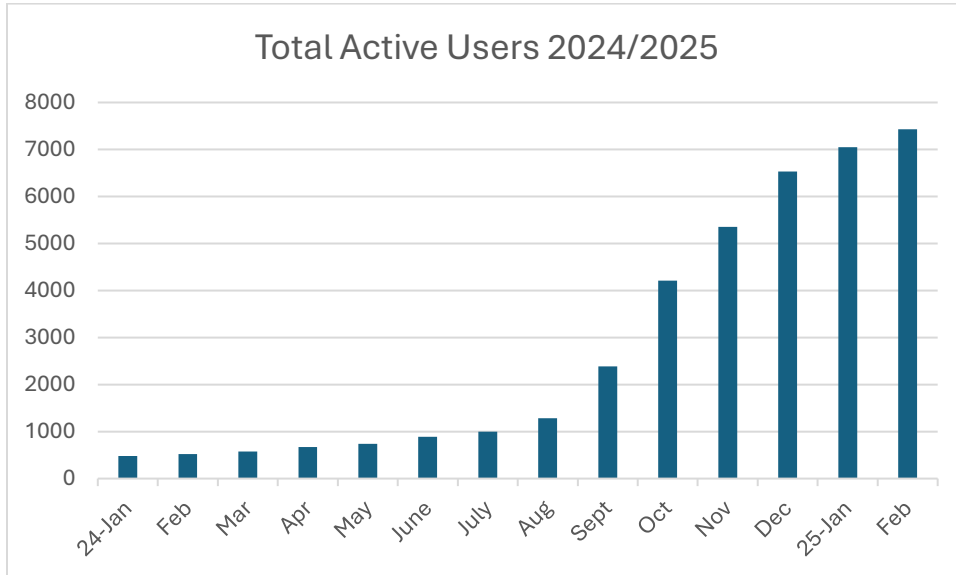
- Average monthly signup prior to the mail campaign (Jan '23-Aug '24):   64

- Average monthly signups during the mail campaign (Aug '24-Dec '24): 1311

- Average monthly signups after the mail campaign (Jan '24-Feb '24): 448

The mail campaign jumpstarted communication to customers and the utilization of different

channels to inform them continues to drive enrollment.

VI.   Innovation

As rates rise for utilities, along with other costs, CCU is determined to continue increasing the

number of customers who self-monitor unusual spikes in costs. Utilizing EyeOnWater can

graphically show the customer how much water is used for irrigation, washing vehicles, and

other activities, influencing them to adjust their usage to save money.

EyeOnWater is a part of the county's upgrade to smart meters and CCU's goal is to continue increasing the number of active users, empowering customers to play an active role in monitoring their usage and costs while promoting more efficient communications with CCU staff.