



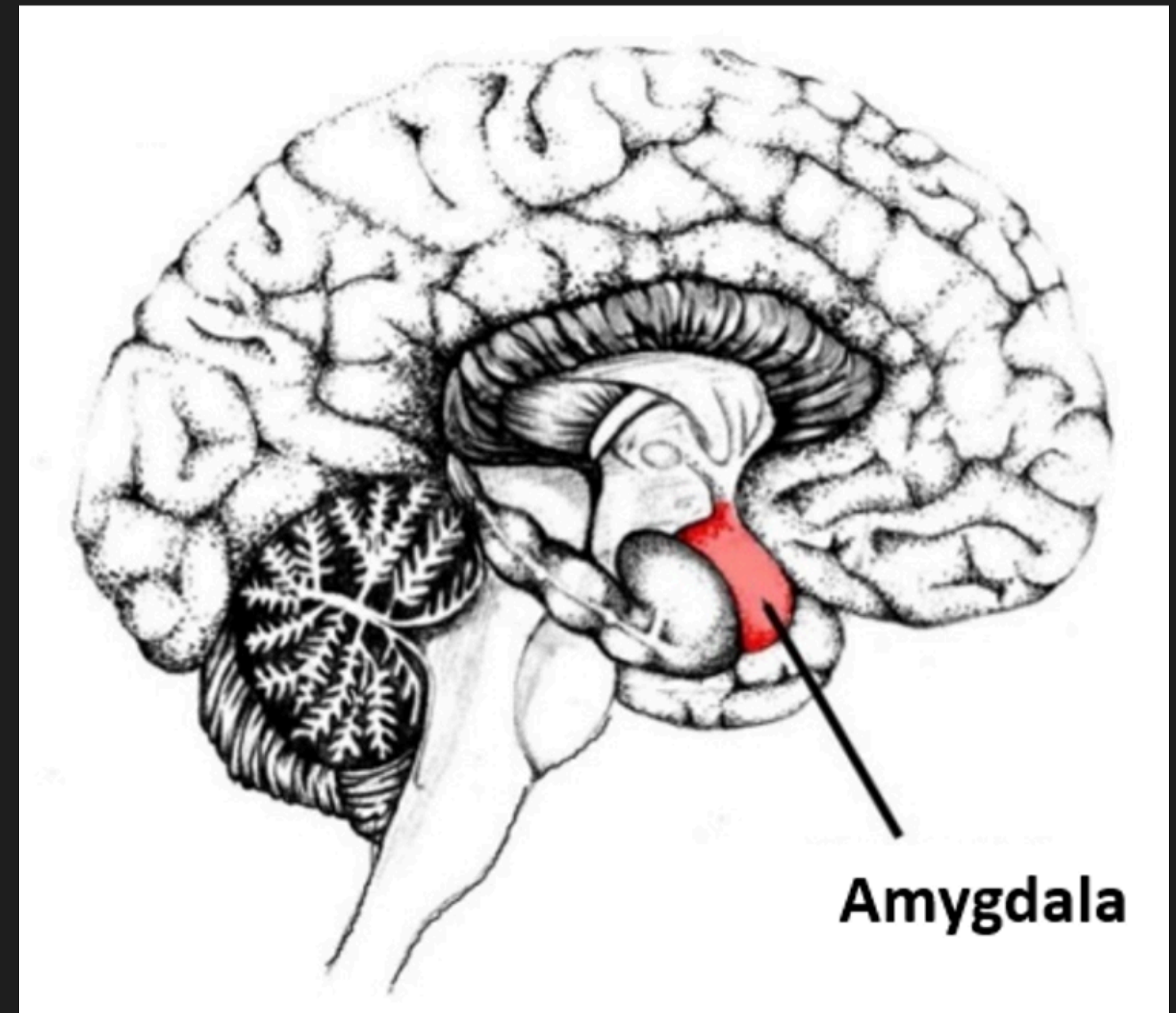
# talking to customers

***CHELSEA BOOZER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ROGUE WATER LAB***

***APRIL 2025 - US CONFERENCE OF MAYORS***

# RISK & CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

- Tool for communicating where fear, anxiety and high emotions are present
- Help return conversation to reasoned discourse and help build trust
- Based on neurological and psychological science



**Your customers  
don't care how  
much you know,  
until they know  
how much you care**



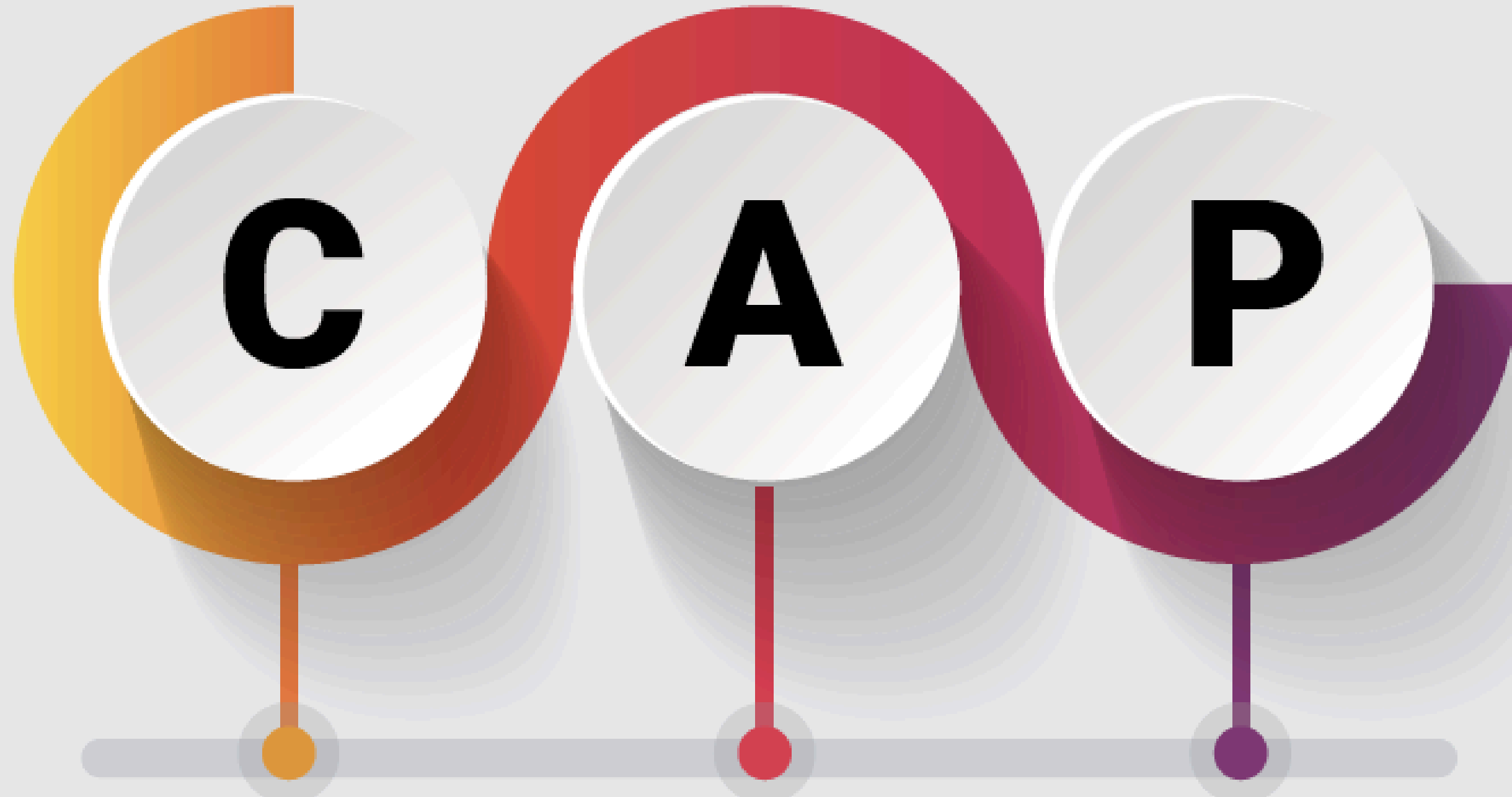


# Communication Methods

- 1. CAP
- 2. AAF
- 3. 27/9/3



Use when responding to a high-concern question or statement.



**Caring Message:**  
Provide a message indicating caring, concern, empathy or compassion. The message should communicate the seriousness of the situation.

**Action Message:**  
State actions you have, are or will take to address the issue or problem. For example, the message might indicate you are cooperating with other organizations or investigating the situation.

**Perspective Message:**  
Provide information that puts the issue in perspective or context.

## CARING

- I understand your concern about children's health and lead in drinking water.

## ACTION

- Our utility has an extensive treatment and monitoring program to ensure the water we produce and deliver protects your family from the risks of lead in drinking water.

## PERSPECTIVE

- Our community water meets every EPA drinking water standard.

# Example: CAP principal to talk about lead

*Question from a worried parent: The news said there's lead in drinking water. What are you doing about that? I have a newborn in my house.*

**CARING:** I understand you're concerned; I have children too. Lancaster Water is focused on protecting your health. There is no lead in your water when it leaves our treatment plant. The risk for lead to enter drinking water comes from pipes and plumbing made of lead.

**ACTION:** We balance the water chemistry to minimize the risk for lead to get into the water. And we actively replace lead pipes when we find them. That's probably why you saw the story on the news.

**PERSPECTIVE:** Based on our records, we do not show a lead service line at your address. But if you're concerned, we can test your drinking water, for free.





**Fort Lauderdale's yellow tap water safe to drink, city says**

[yahoo.com](#)



## I have discolored water in my house. Is it safe and why is it discolored? —

Yes, the water is safe. The substance you see is manganese, which is a natural precipitant of treated water and normally adheres to the sides and bottom of the water main. When the pressure and/or flow of the water changes the manganese can scour off the walls of the main and get into your home or business. Manganese is a natural mineral and is not harmful. Discolored water happens when a water main is bumped or moved, as in construction, or there is a change in the pressure and/or flow within the pipe, such as what happens when a fire hydrant is opened, a valve is operated or a main is broken.

Click here to expand this section.

## What to do about the discolored water?

Discolored water can be caused by many factors, i.e., construction in the area, lightening strikes, operation of a fire hydrant, natural ground movement, and adding additional pumping capacity to the water system. Because most of these factors can not be anticipated or controlled by Central Arkansas Water, it is necessary to address the situation after it has happened.

- Determine if the discoloration is in your hot water or your cold water. If only your hot water is affected the problem most likely is in your hot water heater and you will have to address it as a maintenance issue.
- If your cold water is affected, use as little hot water as possible to keep the discoloration out of your hot water tank.
- If your water is just slightly discolored the color of a brown paper bag or lighter, open all and only your cold water taps and let them run 5-6 minutes.
- Flush your toilets 2-3 times.
- If the initial cold water flush does not clear up the problem, wait about an hour and repeat flushing. This amount of water should not affect your water bill.
- Do not wash laundry in discolored water, it will discolor light clothes. If your water becomes discolored during a laundry in cycle, keep the laundry damp until the water clears. Rewash the clothes, DO NOT USE CHLORINE BEACH.



# AAF – Acknowledge, Action, Follow-Up



**Acknowledge Uncertainty Message:** Identify knowledge gaps and challenges.

**Action Message:** State actions you have, are or will take to address the issue. For example, the message might indicate you are cooperating with other organizations or investigating the situation.

**Follow-Up Message:** Provide information on where people can obtain timely and credible information.

## Caring/Sharing Template

**Use when responding to a question or statement containing incorrect information.**

**Caring Message:** State what you and the person holding the incorrect information have in common.

**Sharing (1) Message:** Invite the person holding incorrect information to share their information with you.

**Sharing (2) Message:** Reshare your information.

**Example:** (1) *I assume you asked this question because you care about..., which I also care about,* (2) *I would greatly appreciate your sharing with me all the information you have so I can review it;* (3) *In the meantime, the information I have indicates...*

## False Allegation Template

**Use when responding to a hostile question, false allegation or criticism.**

- Repeat/paraphrase the question without repeating the negative; repeat instead the opposite; the underlying value or concern or use more neutral language.
- Indicate the issue is important.
- Indicate what you have done, are doing or will do to address the issue.

**Example:** (1) *"You've raised a serious question about "x";* (2) *"x" is important to me;* (3) *We are doing the following to address "x."*



# 27/9/3 Rule

**27**  
Words

The human brain  
can effectively process  
**NO MORE THAN 27** words,  
that can be spoken in  
**9 seconds**, that have  
**3 (or fewer) pieces of**  
**information.**

*(Source: Dr. Vincent Covello  
and the Center for  
Risk Communication)*

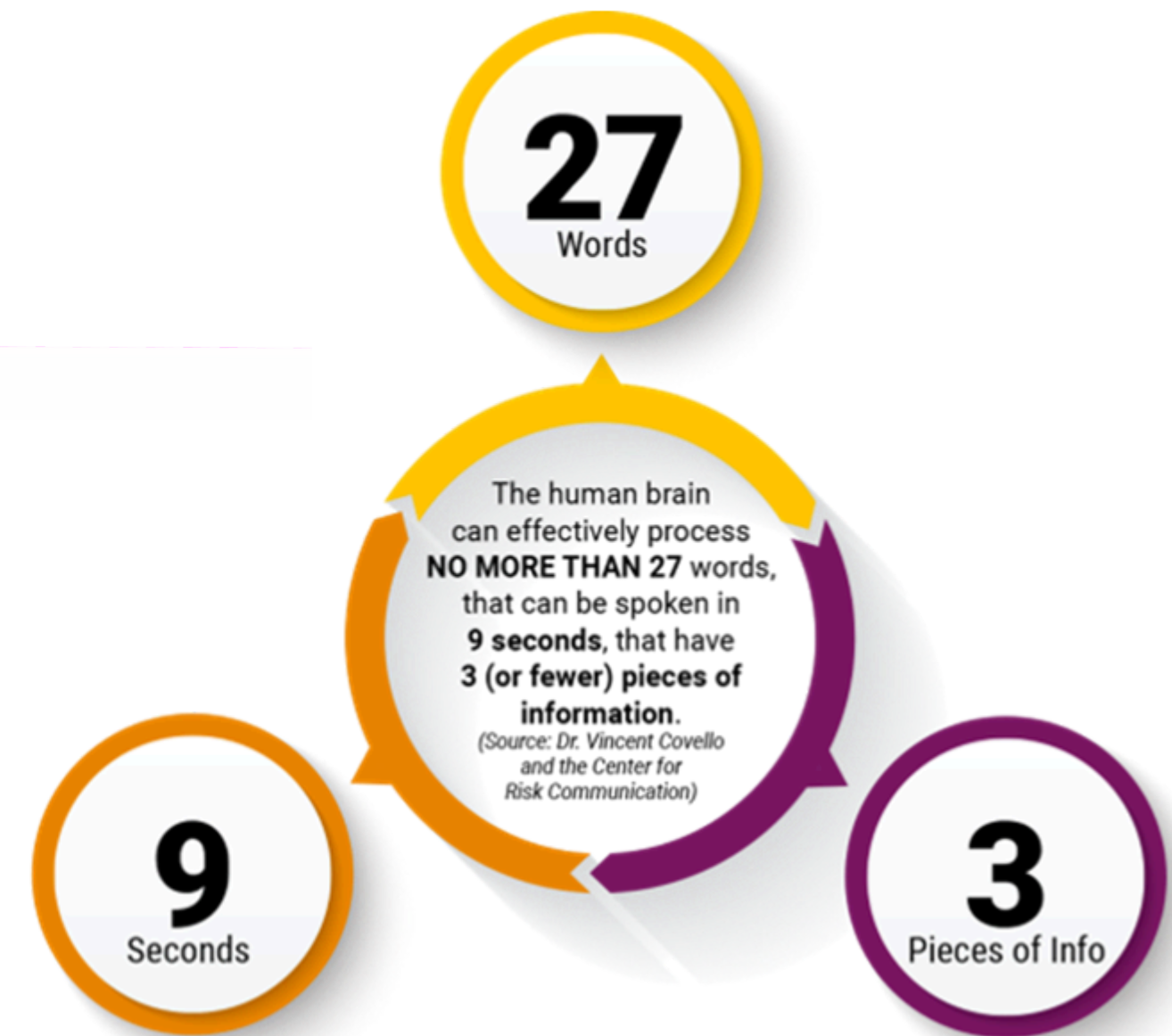
**9**  
Seconds

**3**  
Pieces of Info



# Example: 24/9/7 for PFAS Regulation

- EPA regulations guide our work.
- There are proposed goals for two contaminants PFOA and PFOS.
- These contaminants are part of a group called PFAS, chemicals you do not find in nature.





# REGULATIONS ARE CHANGING. YOUR QUALITY WATER IS NOT.

Due to revisions made by the Environmental Protection Agency, all water systems must comply with the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions requirement by **October, 2024.**



All homes built prior to 1991  
must have their service verified.

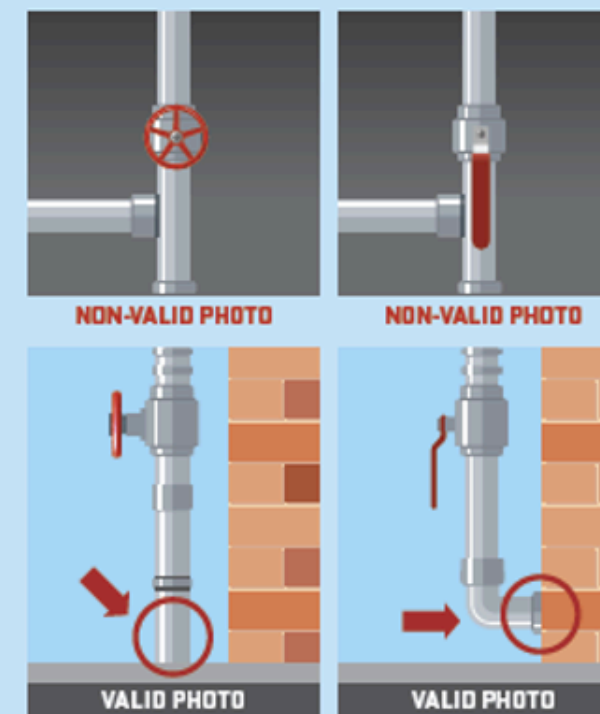
## Help get a handle on lead.

Use the QR code below to send us a photo of your water service line, to help us send required lead warning only to those with lead plumbing.

What does the pipe entering your home look like?

See the photos showing types of pipe that enter from the basement or lowest floor.

Find the water shut-off valve, and trace back to where it punches through the wall or floor.



### Option 1:

Aim your phone's camera at the QR code to submit a photo of your service line and required information, so we know what address this information pertains to.



### Option 2:

Obtain pictures of the service coming into your home using the guidelines pictured above and email them to [help@mawc.org](mailto:help@mawc.org). Please make sure they are well lit and clear.

### Option 3:

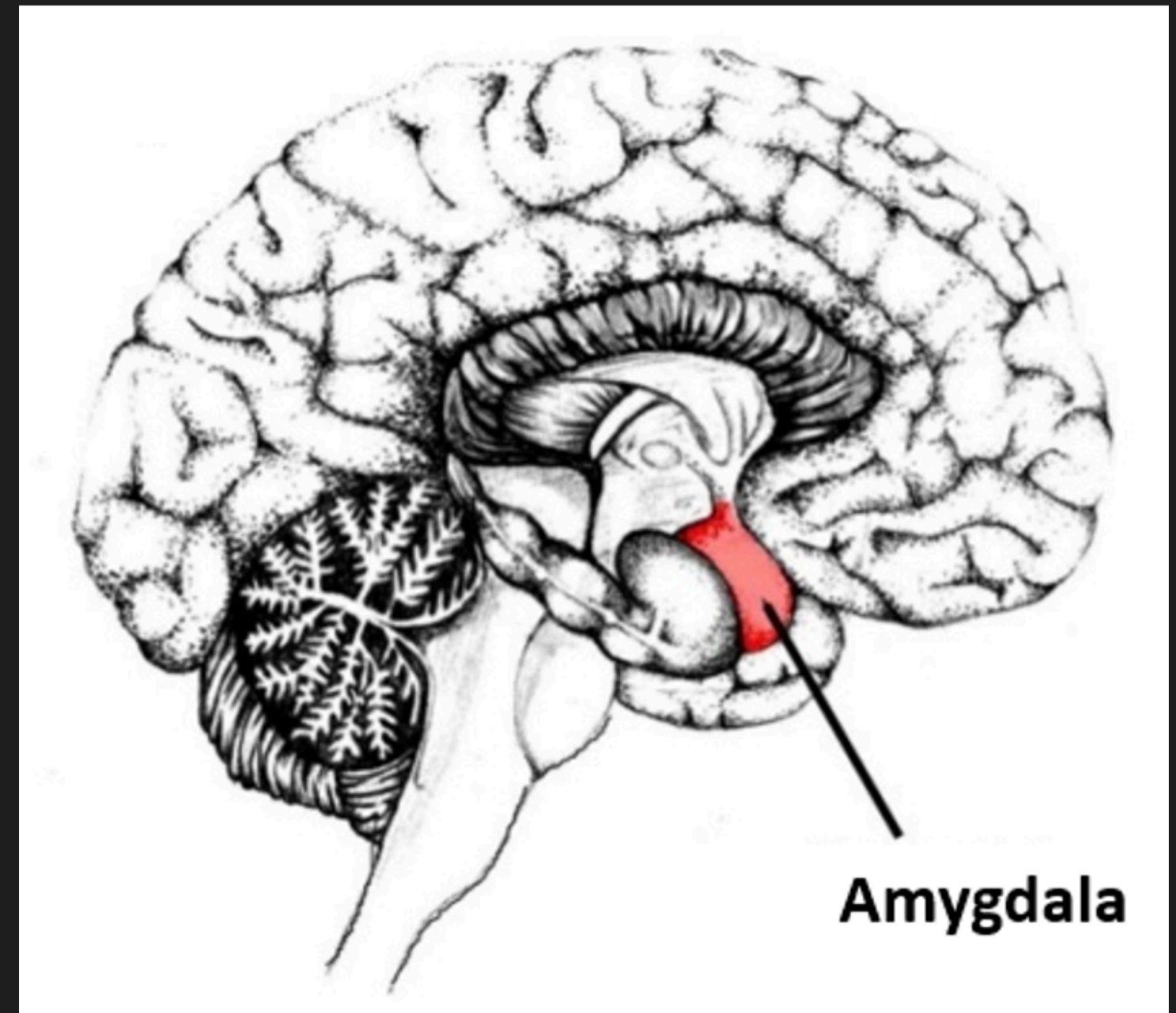
Contact MAWC Customer Service to schedule a day for one of our service technicians to visit your home and verify your service.

Service #: \_\_\_\_\_



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# Current Customer Concerns



# Current Customer Concerns



- PFAS
- Lead
- Fluoride
- Challenges due to lack of infrastructure funding
- Reported SDWA violation
- Affordability
- Legionella
- Cyanotoxins
- Conservation
- Water reuse
- Management/fiduciary responsibility concerns
- Chloramines
- Water Quality (taste, odor, look)

# Quick Response Sheet

## TOPIC: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

### Core Messages

- Protecting community health is our highest priority.
- We protect community health by regularly testing our water sources to ensure our water quality meets or exceeds all EPA regulations.
- We are closely following the emerging research about PFAS and public health.
- Additional information about PFAS and drinking water can be found on our website.

### What are PFAS?

- PFAS are a group of man-made chemicals that can be found in products like nonstick pans, stain repellents and fire-fighting foam.
- PFAS have been manufactured and used in a variety of industries since the 1940s.
- PFAS in drinking water is typically localized and associated with a specific facility that used a PFAS-containing product (manufacturing and firefighter training (fire foam)).



# How to respond to negative social media?

**Respond quickly.** Respond in short order even if you must provide a “hold message” to the commenter letting them (and those who are watching) know you are looking into the issue.

1

**Use a human tone.** Upset customers need empathy and a friendly, caring tone. The words you use when you are communicating in the spotlight matter a lot.

2

**Tailor your responses.** It is very tempting to quickly respond to a complaint or concern with a link to your website. Instead, acknowledge the concern directly.

3

**Take responsibility.** Ignoring a customer’s concern will aggravate them and potentially others who may be watching for your response. Take responsibility if this situation is something under your control.

4

# How to respond to negative social media?

**Be visible.** Unless the comments you are receiving contain violent or offensive language, be transparent and open when responding to negative social media.

5

**Pause scheduled social media posts.** If you are dealing with a risk communication situation on social media, nothing is worse than having a fun, quirky post pop up in the middle of it.

7

**Try to move commenters offline.** When responding to comments that would be better handled by phone or in-person, offer to do just that.

6

**Communicate internally about your social media interactions.** Ensure everyone in your organization is on the same page about who will speak and what will be said to prevent misinformation from spreading.

8



# Do's and Don'ts for responding to a social media attack



## Social Media Spotlight Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Respond quickly – within hours	Wait and see, and respond days later
Take the conversation offline	Engage with the customer extensively about their concern on the platform
Use a human tone, expressing empathy	Respond in "corporate speak"
Tailor your responses to the comment	Make the same generic response to every comment
Assume good intent	Take comments personally and respond in kind
Look into the issue quickly and post the resolution	Ignore the issue
Allow negative comments to be posted (if it meets your policy)	Delete negative comments
Monitor all your comments	"Set it and forget it" and check on your social media accounts infrequently
Thank positive commenters	Ignore those who take the time to tell you you're doing a good job



# Switch the Mindset: Technical to Conversational

Your message to the consumer	The consumer hears
I want to talk with you about lead in drinking water	
Our research shows levels of PFOA at 8 ppt	
We will commence with a project to install a 20-inch pipe on your street	
I need you to flush the lines	

# Switch the Mindset: Technical to Conversational

Your message to the consumer	The consumer hears
I want to talk with you about lead in drinking water	<i>There's lead in my drinking water.</i>
Our research shows levels of PFOA at 8 ppt	
We will commence with a \$5 million project to install a 20-inch pipe on your street	
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I need you to flush the lines	<i>Flush the toilet?</i>

# Consumers want to hear from you

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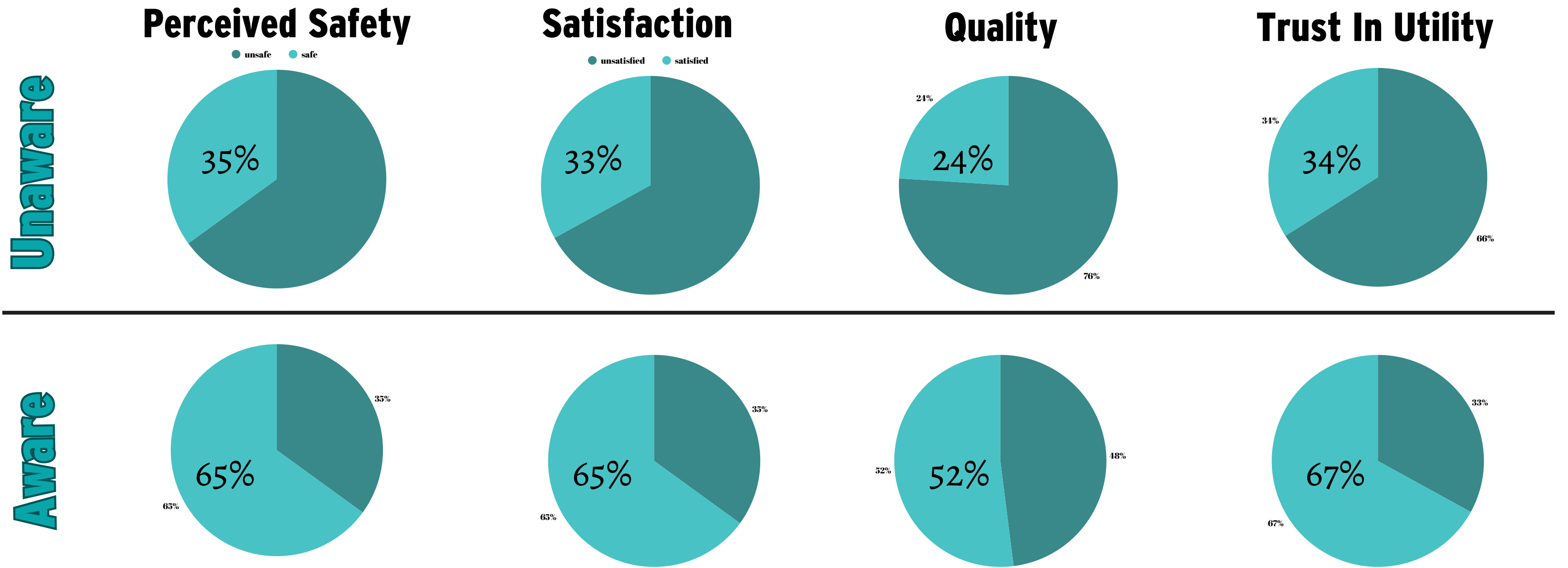
CUSTOMERS WHO HEARD  
FROM THEIR UTILITY WERE  
**3X MORE LIKELY**  
TO SAY THEIR WATER'S  
SAFETY HAD IMPROVED

- AWWA 2023 Morning Consult Study





# Customers who were aware of their utility's testing frequency had a more positive view of tap water.



- AWWA 2023 Morning Consult Study

# Thank You



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WATER  
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