



The City and County of San Francisco's Emergency Firefighting Water System

The City and County of San Francisco has multiple systems and sources of water supply to fight fires in an emergency while protecting residences and businesses.

City Drinking Water System

The standard-pressure City drinking water system is connected to approximately 8,500 smaller white hydrants. These are located on every block throughout the City and are regularly used by the Fire Department to fight fires. They are fed by 12 reservoirs and six tanks in the City, which are supplied by additional reservoirs on the Peninsula, East Bay, and Sierra Nevada.

Emergency Firefighting Water System

The high-pressure Emergency Firefighting Water System is connected to approximately 1,500 larger hydrants. (This system used to be called the Auxiliary Water Supply System, or AWSS) with blue, black, and red tops to represent their pressure zone.

Constructed in the decades following the 1906 earthquake, the Emergency Firefighting Water System is an entirely separate water supply and pipeline network for fighting large fires, particularly after emergency events such as earthquakes. The system consists of a resilient 135-mile pipeline network, a high elevation reservoir, two large capacity tanks, two seawater pumping stations, and bay water intakes (suction connections). The system has unique capabilities, including the ability to deliver water at the high pressures needed by the San Francisco Fire Department to fight large fires. Additionally, it has the ability to use water from the bay as an unlimited source for firefighting.

Get to Know your Hydrants

The color of the Emergency Firefighting Water System hydrants indicates where the water comes from.



Black Top
Twin Peaks



Red Top
Ashbury Tanks



Blue Top
Jones Street Tank



White Hydrant
City drinking water system

Fulton Street Emergency Hydrants

These hydrants are located on Fulton Street from 22nd Avenue to 48th Avenue. They are supplied by Stowe Lake, which holds 15.3 million gallons of water for firefighting operations. In addition, there is one hydrant located mid-block between 34th Avenue and 35th Avenue that is supplied by Spreckles Lake, which holds 7.8 million gallons of water for firefighting operations. These are owned by the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department.

Making Upgrades

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission took over management of the Emergency Firefighting Water System in 2010. The SFPUC has been working with the Fire Department and Department of Public Works to upgrade the existing Emergency Firefighting Water System. We have completed the installation of 30 new cisterns to provide additional sources of water for firefighting throughout the City, with 15 of those new cisterns in westside neighborhoods. There are now roughly 200 cisterns across the City. We have also made upgrades and repairs to existing pump stations and reservoirs, and the construction of new pipelines.

New Westside Emergency Firefighting System

The SFPUC and our City partners are working on the planning, design, and construction of a new Emergency Firefighting Water System on the west side of the City. This seismically resilient system will serve drinking water during normal operations but can switch to delivering water at high pressure from our drinking water system or from Lake Merced during emergencies. The system would be constructed in phases. These upgrades were funded by voter-approved Earthquake Safety and Emergency Response bonds.

To learn more visit us at
sfpuc.gov/Westside-Firefighting

