



Highlights

Why OCA Did This Study

In accordance with the Office of the City Auditor's Fiscal Year 2018 Audit Work Plan, we conducted a performance audit of the Public Utilities Department's Water Meter Cover Replacement Program.

The overall objectives of this audit were to:

- Assess whether efficiency improvements can be made to the water meter box/lid replacement process to shorten service request completion time.
- Assess whether the water meter cover replacement program has the staffing capacity to complete service requests in less time than its current goal of six months.

What OCA Recommends

OCA made 11 recommendations to improve the Box and Lids Group's productivity, efficiency, and response times, all of which management agreed to implement. Key recommendations include:

- PUD management should implement and enforce formal performance standards for Box and Lid crews, including expectations for the amount of time crews should spend in the field and the number of box and lid replacements crews should complete each day.
- PUD should provide additional training and resources to other crews that refer service requests to the Box and Lid Group to ensure that service requests can be efficiently prioritized and addressed on the first trip to the location.
- PUD should determine the number of crew members needed to meet timeline goals, and re-evaluate whether the current goal of addressing box and lid maintenance issues within six months is appropriate, given the City's emphasis on customer service.

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Performance Audit of the Public Utilities Department's Water Meter Cover Replacement Program

A Lack of Management Oversight and Accountability along with Process Inefficiencies and Limited Staffing Resources Significantly Delay Box and Lid Replacement

What OCA Found

[The Public Utilities Department \(PUD\) owns and is responsible for approximately 281,500 water meters – and accompanying covers \(boxes and lids\)](#) throughout the City of San Diego (City). Quickly addressing box and lid maintenance issues is essential to meet customer expectations, reduce the City's liability for trip and fall injuries, protect water metering infrastructure, and enhance the appearance of the City's public right-of-way.



[We found that although PUD has a goal of addressing box and lid maintenance issues within six months after they are reported, this goal is rarely met.](#) In FY 2017, only 25 percent of box and lid replacements were completed within PUD's six-month goal. Lids took approximately 321 days (11 months) to replace, while boxes took significantly longer, at an average of 630 days (1.7 years).

We found that PUD's delayed response to box and lid maintenance issues resulted from a lack of management oversight and accountability; a variety of process inefficiencies; and inadequate strategic planning. Specifically:

- PUD has not ensured adequate oversight and accountability for Box and Lids Group staff - crews spend an average of only 3.6 hours in the field per workday, and complete far fewer box and lid replacements than could be reasonably expected;
- Trips to repair box and lid issues are frequently wasted because issues are not correctly diagnosed or sufficiently communicated by other PUD crews;
- PUD's legacy service request system did not have sufficient controls to prevent duplicate service requests;
- Service requests are often grouped inefficiently, leading crews to spend an excessive amount of time driving between work locations; and
- PUD has not adjusted staffing levels to compensate for increased box and lid workload generated by the AMI implementation project.