

Memorandum



Date: September 18, 2015

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: Information on Residential Water Bill Inquiries

There have been many inquiries recently about residential water bills. Much of this is due to unusual weather patterns this year – record-breaking rainfall in the spring, followed by high temperatures and an extremely dry July and August. These conditions contributed to unusually low consumption and lower water bills in the spring followed by increased usage and higher water bills currently. June 2015 bills included the period when Dallas experienced over 20 inches of rainfall. The months of July and August had only 0.62 inches of rainfall. This sudden change in conditions contributed to the contrast between June’s residential water bills and those received in July, August and continuing into September.

Additionally, Dallas has a tiered rate structure where higher water use is billed at increasing rates. The tiered rate structure was adopted in October 2001 as part of a long-term water conservation strategy. Water usage over 15,000 gallons per month is billed at the fourth, and highest residential tier rate of \$7.63 per 1,000 gallons. The current first tier rate is \$1.80 per 1,000 gallons for the first 4,000 gallons used. The proposed rate increase does not go into effect until October 1, so the proposed rate has no impact on the July, August and September bills.

The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center’s three month seasonal outlook for October through December forecasts lower than normal temperatures and higher than normal precipitation for the Dallas area. This should contribute to lower outdoor water use, and correspondingly lower water bills in the coming months.

Attached is information on water usage, rainfall and general information that may help you in responding to the questions you are receiving.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information.



Mark McDaniel
Assistant City Manager

c: A.C. Gonzalez, City Manager
Craig Kinton, City Auditor
Judge Daniel F. Solis, Administrative Judge
Jill A. Jordan, Assistant City Manager
Joey Zapata, Assistant City Manager
Sana Syed, Public Information Officer
Elsa Cantu, Assistant to the City Manager – Council Office

Warren M. S. Ernst, City Attorney
Rosa A. Rios, City Secretary
Ryan S. Evans, First Assistant City Manager
Eric D. Campbell, Assistant City Manager
Jeanne Chipperfield, Chief Financial Officer
Jo M. (Jody) Puckett, P.E., Director

FAQ's RESIDENTIAL WATER BILL INQUIRIES (September 2015)

1. Why was my bill so high in July/August? I do not recall using that much water.

Answer – In Dallas, we have seen an overall increase in water consumption for July and August as compared to the spring months and same period last year.

Last July and August rainfall totaled 4.44 inches. For July and August 2015, rainfall totaled 0.62 inches resulting in overall consumption averaging 96 million gallons a day (MGD) higher than the same period last year (567.0 MGD compared to 470.5 MGD last summer). Residential monthly consumption for July and August 2015 averaged 2.9 BG, which is 97% higher than the average of 1.5 BG for the prior four months (March through June 2015).

Customers have different consumption patterns. We always recommend customers to check for leaks on their property, including automatic sprinkler systems. In addition, customers can review and compare their consumption for the same period in prior years. Dallas Water Utilities (DWU) also offers free automatic irrigation system check-ups. To find out more about this service and to schedule an evaluation for a free irrigation system check, please visit <http://savedallaswater.com/> or contact us at (214) 670-3155.

2. Is there a problem with my meter? Is that why my consumption is high?

Answer – Meters are mechanical devices with a series of internal gears. These mechanisms move as water flows through the meter, recording the usage. All meters are factory calibrated to industry standards prior to being shipped, and last at least 10 to 15 years. Meters begin to wear and slow down with age, and eventually stop registering; therefore, allowing more water to flow through than is actually recorded. This means that older meters are most likely to under bill actual consumption. Water meters cannot run faster than designed to run, nor can they run backwards. It is not mechanically possible for the meter to register more water than the actual usage. DWU does routinely test meter accuracy, and has a replacement schedule for meters according to manufacturing recommendations.

3. Have water rates increased this summer?

Answer – Water rates have not increased since October 1, 2014, however, they are scheduled to be increased October 1, 2015. Please find attached a current and proposed rate sheet.

Residential water rates are based on the prior month's actual water usage. In addition to a customer charge, the bill contains a volume charge based on water usage. Dallas has had a four tiered increasing rate structure since 2001. The more water a customer uses, the higher the rate. The first 4,000 gallons has a rate of \$1.80 per 1,000 gallons while all usage in the fourth tier (over 15,000 gallons) is over four times higher and has a rate of \$7.63.

The contrast of little or no outdoor watering in May and June followed by more normal summer watering levels caused a significant change from one month's consumption to the following.

4. My water bill is high. Is it possible I have a leak in the property?

Answer - If a customer thinks their water consumption is higher than it should be, he/she should check their property for leaks. Some common water leaks include toilet flapper valves (the usual culprit of a “running” toilet) as well as automatic irrigation systems and swimming pools. Some leaks may be obvious, others may be sporadic and require some detective work.

How to detect a leak? First turn off all water using fixtures in your home. Next, go to your water meter and check to see if the red circular test hand on the face of the meter is moving. (The red hand is the low flow indicator.) If all known water use is turned off and the hand is moving, you either have a leak or something in your home is using water.

Toilets are the most common cause of high water usage and leaks in the home, and often occur without audible or visual evidence. Leaking toilets can waste as much as 200 gallons of water a day and if undetected could result in an additional 6,000 gallons of usage per month. A simple method to detect a toilet leak: put a few drops of food coloring in the toilet tank. If the toilet bowl shows traces of the food coloring 15 or 30 minutes later (without flushing), you have a leak. Toilet flapper valves wear out and should be checked once a year. The loss from leaking faucets and shower heads can also add up – a one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons per year.

If a customer discovers a leak, and then repairs that leak, Dallas Water Utilities may be able to adjust the water bill. The contact number for leak adjustments is 214-670-3196 or the following email link:

http://dallascityhall.com/departments/waterutilities/Pages/billing_water04.aspx

5. Is it possible for a meter to be read incorrectly?

Answer - Although it is uncommon, the meter reader can incorrectly enter the reading in the hand-held device. For this reason, the hand-held device and the billing system identify suspected high or low consumption numbers. This information is reviewed, and suspected misreads are scheduled to be reread. If the read is found to be an over/under read, it is usually corrected before the invoice is generated or in the following month’s invoice.

6. Could my bill be high because my consumption was estimated?

Answer - While estimates are used from time to time, they typically do not lead to larger bills. DWU may occasionally estimate meter reads due to inclement weather, dangerous situations regarding hazards in or around meter boxes and when access to the meter is prohibited (i.e. box covered by construction or storm debris, trash, vehicles, etc.). If a meter read is estimated, the billing system is designed to calculate the estimated usage based on historical data for the same time period of previous years. The estimated consumption will be adjusted if found to be overstated when the next actual meter reading is obtained.

Dallas Water Utilities Monthly Payment Rates

Customer Charge	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed
	Water	Water	Sewer	Sewer	Combined	Combined
5/8 Inch Meter	\$4.85	\$5.12	4.45	4.58	\$9.30	\$9.70
3/4 Inch Meter	6.70	7.07	6.00	6.27	\$12.70	\$13.34
1 Inch Meter	9.74	10.28	8.75	9.10	\$18.49	\$19.38
1 1/2 Inch Meter	18.13	19.14	16.60	17.52	\$34.73	\$36.66
2 Inch Meter	29.50	31.14	26.15	27.60	\$55.65	\$58.74
3 Inch Meter	69.09	72.93	63.79	66.72	\$132.88	\$139.65
4 Inch Meter	114.79	121.17	103.90	106.68	\$218.69	\$227.85
6 Inch Meter	227.94	240.61	206.50	209.97	\$434.44	\$450.58
8 Inch Meter	378.85	400.50	340.15	350.51	\$719.00	\$751.01
10 Inch Meter or larger	582.59	614.98	525.50	550.72	\$1,108.09	\$1,165.70

Usage Charge per 1,000 gallons

	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed
	Water	Water	Sewer	Sewer
Residential				
Up to 4,000 gallons	1.80	1.87	4.95	5.20
4,001 to 10,000 gallons	3.91	4.13	4.95	5.20
10,001 to 15,000 gallons	5.50	5.81	4.95	5.20
Above 15,000 gallons	7.63	8.20	4.95	5.20
General Services				
Up to 10,000 gallons	3.05	3.47	3.70	3.95
Above 10,000 gallons	3.45	3.71	3.70	3.95
Above 10,000 gallons for usage more than 1.4 times annual monthly average	5.00	5.63	3.70	3.95
Optional General Services				
1st million gallons or less (minimum)	2,025.00	2,135.27	3.38	3.56
Above 1 million gallons (per 1,000 gallons)	2.75	2.95	3.38	3.56

Proposed rates effective Oct. 1, 2015

The above Prompt Payment Rates apply if payment is received on or before the due date shown on the bill.

Payments received after the due date will incur a 5% late fee.

* Sewer Charges for residential accounts are calculated on an average of the water billed in December, January, February and March (40,000 gallons maximum) or the actual month's water consumption, whichever is less. Sewer charges for general services and optional general services accounts are based on the month's water consumption unless sewer is metered separately.

Industrial wastewater discharges containing concentrations of BOD and/or Suspended Solids greater than 250 milligrams per liter are assessed sewer surcharges. Certain commercial users such as restaurants, bars/lounges, small food processors and equipment service facilities are assessed standard surcharges. These surcharges are included as part of the monthly bill.