

Water/Sewer Bill FAQs

Why is my water bill so high?

Running toilets are the most common cause of high water bills, even though they are not always the easiest to find. The best way to check for a leak in the toilet is to add a couple of drops of food coloring to the water in the back tank of the stool. Wait 15-20 minutes without flushing the toilet, check the water in the bowl of the toilet. If the water in the bowl has changed color, then there is evidence that your toilet needs repair. This also may require several times testing to discover the leak.

Other possible explanations:

- *A change in the number of people in the household*
- *New appliances such as dishwasher, hot water tank, heating system or lawn sprinklers*
- *Result of higher seasonal demands such as filling pools, watering lawns or washing cars*

Why is my bill so much higher than my neighbor's?

Many times neighbors like to compare water bills. However, this comparison does not accurately reflect what may be occurring in your household. Water usage habits vary widely from the number of people in your household to how often hands are washed to how long you shower. Other factors could include what type of toilet(s) you have, the size of your washing machine or if you bathe rather than shower.

Here are a few water usage facts:

- *It takes 20 gallons of water to wash dishes by hand*
- *Taking a bath uses approximately 36 gallons of water*
- *Taking a shower uses anywhere from 25 – 50 gallons of water*
- *5 to 7 gallons are used each time the toilet is flushed (lower if you have a newer model)*

Because of the different variables that could contribute to the amount of water used, the most accurate way to compare the usage would be to go back to a year ago and compare the usage. This allows for a more exact comparison.

Here are some examples of monthly usage for a family of 4:

- *4 showers or baths @ 40 gallons each = 160 gallons per day, 160 gallons @ 30 day billing cycle = 4,800 gallons per month.*
- *4 family members flushing the toilet on average of 3 times a day per person @ 5 gallons each would result in 1,800 gallons used per month.*
- *Washing dishes in the sink once a day @ 20 gallons would result in 600 gallons per month.*

Adding all of the above would be a monthly usage of 7,200 gallons.

How often will I receive a water/sewer bill?

Residential users receive a bill every three months; the city is divided into 3 sections, each having a different billing and due date. The breakdown is as follows:

Bills mailed 1st of each month are due the 20th.

We will be out of town for an extended period, should we have the water turned off?

This is strictly the owner's decision. A few things to consider:

- If you do not notify this office that the water is to be turned off and the account finalized, monthly bills will be mailed as usual.*
- Will someone be checking the house in case problems arise?*
- If your furnace has a built-in humidifier or if you have a sump pump that uses water you may want to leave the water on.*
- If you decide to leave the water on, we recommend that you leave a contact name and number with us in case we notice an increase in water usage while you are away.*

Where and how can I pay my bill?

- In City Hall located at 245 Washington Street, Watertown, NY. Business hours are M – F 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. The office is closed on all major holidays. We will accept check, cash or money orders.*
 - Automatic bank draft – forms are available at our office, or you can print one off the website: www.watertown-ny.gov and attach a voided check and return to this office. You will still receive a bill each month that will list your usage and dollar amount. It will be deducted from your account on the due date.*
- On-line bill pay at www.watertown-ny.gov follow the links to make payment. You will need owner's last name and street name only as it appears on the bill. This will incur a fee that will be added to your transaction.*

Emergency Shut-offs

In the event of a line leak inside or out that is causing excessive water use, you may call this office at (315) 785-7757 during normal business hours and we can send someone out to shut the water off at the meter. If an emergency should occur after normal business hours, please call (315) 785-7845 to report the problem.

To report any water emergencies such as broken water mains, service lines (between meter and street), fire hydrants or gushing water in the street, please call (315) 785-7757 and inform staff of the problem. We will direct your call to the appropriate department. After hours call (315) 785-7845.

Leaks occurring at any place after our meter will be the owner responsibility. If the leak results in a higher than usual water bill, it is the owners responsibility to pay for the usage. We do allow payment plans to alleviate the financial burden. Please call our office, (315)785-7757, if you wish to set up a payment plan.

Hints for avoiding frozen lines

With temperatures plummeting during the winter months, the following list may be helpful to keep lines thawed.

- *Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warm air to get to the pipes.*
- *Allow water to trickle or slowly drip from a faucet.*
- *Make sure pipes are well insulated inside and out. If living in a mobile home, make sure underpinning is secure and pipes under trailer are well insulated. Some customers use heat tape which is strictly up to the homeowner.*
- *Remove hoses from outside faucets.*
- *If you plan on being gone overnight or for an extended period, set the thermostat to no lower than 55 F.*

In the event of possible frozen lines, you may call (315) 785-7757 to report the address. Our personnel will come out and determine whether the problem is on you or the City. If there is water at the meter, it is the owner responsibility to thaw the lines. If the meter is frozen, we will thaw to restore water service at no charge to the homeowner.

Annual shut-offs for unpaid accounts

Water will be shut off for non-payment once a year. Check water bills for notes.

Annual transfer to City Tax Bill

Any amount still outstanding as of June 15TH each year will be added to the City Tax Bill due Aug 5th. Check water bills for notes.

How can I change my mailing address?

Call (315)-785-7757 to update information. The water department must send bills to where the owner is living.

Can I bill my residential tenant for water and sewer charges?

This would be part of the rental agreement.

I am moving. What should I do?

Call (315)-785-7757 to update information. The water department must send bills to where the owner is living.

I am buying/selling property. What should I do?

Call (315)-785-7757 to update information.

I had to have my water service pipe replaced. Who is responsible for the cost?

The Customer owns the water service pipe from the water service connection in the street to the meter and all other pipes after the meter. The customer is therefore responsible for the cost of a water service pipe replacement.

Why is my drinking water cloudy?

Cloudiness in water is caused by tiny air bubbles. After a short time, the bubbles rise to the top and the cloudiness disappears.

Why is my drinking water discolored?

Discolored water is usually caused by flow changes in the water mains. Sediment, which is usually caused by pipe corrosion, can build up on the inside of water main pipes. This sediment can be disturbed when the pressure or direction of the water flow changes, causing it to become suspended in the drinking water and come out of the tap.

What do I do if my water is discolored?

If you experience discolored water, run all cold-water faucets for two to three minutes, shut the water off, allow the water to settle for about 15 minutes, and run the water again for two to three minutes. If the water does not run clear, repeat this process. Do not run the hot water faucets until the cold water runs clear. If the water does not become clear after repeating this process multiple times, contact us at 315-785-7757.

How are meters read?

The City has an electronic reading system that uses radio signals to read your meter remotely. A receiver mounted inside our vehicle will receive a radio signal from each meter as the vehicle drives down the street.

Can we still actually read the meter inside the house?

Yes, your meter in the house still has a dial/odometer/LED readout that can be manually read if necessary.

How are sewer bills calculated?

Sewer bills are calculated based on the amount of water used during the billing period.

If I water my lawn will I have to pay sewer charges for this?

Yes, all water used is billed on your sewer bill.

What units of measure are the water and sewer bills in?

The bill amount is in cubic feet of water. One cubic foot of water is equal to 7.48 gallons of water, so if you take the monthly usage amount on your bill and multiply it by 7.48, you can find out how many gallons of water you used for the month.

See Code Books On-Line at the City's website www.watertown-ny.gov Chapter 301, subsection 17, Rates and Charges.