

Water/Wastewater Utility Bill Forgiveness

- Drumheller's Utility Department conducted a review of industry practice in Southern Alberta regarding water/wastewater utility billing adjustments.

Communities Polled:

• Brooks	14,451
• Stettler	5,952
• Strathmore	13,756
• Olds	9,184
• Taber	8,428
• Innisfail	7,847
• Airdrie	68,091
• Calgary	1,635,000
• Three Hills	3,212
• Hanna	2,559

Also looked online at:

- Guelph 135,474
- High River 13,584
- Lethbridge 92,730
- Cochrane 29,277
- USEPA

What we found.

“If it goes through the meter, they are charged”

Guelph has a policy

Calgary has concerns about theirs

Water Meter Accuracy

- One of the most frequent customer concerns is meter accuracy, especially following the receipt of a high bill. In the City of Calgary, (345,000+ residential customers) a meter failure or malfunction has not been the cause of any high consumption case. Strathmore does offer to send meters out for testing at a independent company with an upfront \$250.00 deposit, if the meter comes back within range they keep the deposit.
- Drumheller does also offer to send out the meter for testing as per our Water and Wastewater Bylaw, Part 9, meter testing.

Wastewater/Sewer Charges

- In all communities polled and to my knowledge it is a calculation of the water usage rate.
- Some communities such as Lethbridge and Cochrane use the winter average in the summer months to compensate for lawn and garden watering etc.

We also found.

Customer Assistance Programs

- The larger cities, Calgary, Guelph and the USEPA all talked about CAP's
- All of the communities did practice some sort of CAP

Customer Assistance Programs Calgary

- “If a customer receives a bill equal to or greater than three times their average seasonal monthly use, and the consumption was unintentional and has returned to normal, they are eligible to have that bill adjusted to the amount of their average bill (monthly basic service charges and average water consumption) for a maximum of three billing cycles.”



Customer Assistance Programs Calgary

High Water Consumption Investigation Checklist must be filled out before any assistance is given



High Water Consumption Investigation Checklist

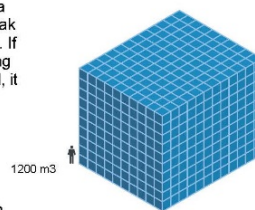
Water leaks happen for many reasons, and any water using fixture or appliance can eventually have a leak.



15 m3

Leaks can range in size. A small stream of water from a faucet can waste 15 cubic metres (m3) per month. A leak this size could increase your bill by \$47.26 each month. If the water level in a toilet tank is too high and overflowing into the overflow tube, or the flapper is completely lifted, it can waste 1,200 m3 per month. A leak this size could increase your bill by \$3,780.48 each month.

The City and ENMAX are committed to working with customers who experience a high bill. The first step in the process is for you to complete this High Water Consumption Investigation Checklist. Customers are often able to identify the cause of their high water consumption by completing this checklist.

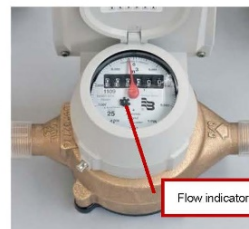


1200 m3



Step 1 – Is there a leak? Your water meter can help you check!

- Turn off all fixtures that use water inside and outside your home. (See Step 2 for a list.)
Note: Make sure no one is using water in the home. Do not turn off the main valve that connects your property to the City water supply.
 - Find the water meter. It is located where your water service enters your home. This is most often in the basement.
 - Is the flow indicator – which may look like a triangle, gear or needle – still turning?
 - If YES, you have a water leak somewhere in your home. Go to Step 2.
 - If NO, there is no water leak in your home.
- Then why is my bill so high? There could be many reasons – a toilet flapper that corrected itself on the next flush, visitors to your home, increased outdoor watering during the summer, filling a hot tub or pool, or installing a new water using appliance like a humidifier.



Flow indicator



Step 2 – Find the leak

Always check for toilet leaks first – they are the #1 source of water leaks

- Drop - Put several drops of food colouring into the toilet tank and wait 10 minutes. You can also use coffee or toilet bowl cleaner.
- Peek - Look in the bowl. If the water changes colour, you've got a leak.
- Repair - Toilet leaks can be caused by faulty gaskets, flappers that do not close or high water level in the toilet tank.

For more information on these and other leaks visit [Calgary.ca/waterleaks](https://calgary.ca/waterleaks)

Did you know?

How fast the indicator is turning can help show what is leaking. Slow: It could be a dripping tap or a humidifier malfunctioning. Fast: It could be a toilet tank is over filling, a flapper that isn't closing or an irrigation system leak.

High Water Consumption Investigation Checklist

If the source of the leak isn't a toilet, check all water using fixtures inside and outside your home.

Indoor Leaks

- ☒ Water softener
- ☐ Air conditioner
- ☐ Hot water tank
- ☐ Faucets
- ☐ Humidifier
- ☐ Dishwasher
- ☐ Bathtubs & showers
- ☐ Refrigerator
- ☐ Water dispenser/ice maker

Outdoor Leaks

- ☒ Outdoor taps
- ☐ Irrigation system
- ☐ Fountain or water feature
- ☐ Water Service Line

If you have an irrigation system, walk all areas of your lawn and garden.

- A depression, hole or soft spot in the ground may indicate a water leak below the surface. Contact a certified irrigation specialist to check your underground sprinkler system.
- Look for broken sprinkler head(s) and riser(s) or signs of overspray onto sidewalks, driveways, walls or buildings; runoff into gutter/street.
- Check the mainline irrigation connection for damage or pooling water.

If you are still unsure if you have a water leak in or outside your home, contact a certified plumber to request a complete inspection.



Step 3: Once you've fixed the leak, submit a meter reading

Once you or your plumber have fixed the leak, it's time to submit a meter reading. Take a picture or write down the digits on the face of the meter.

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Take note of the digits with a white background (before the decimal point) and the digits with a black background (behind the decimal point) on the meter.

Call ENMAX at 310-2010.

- Make sure you have your utility account number.
- Choose the option for home and residential services.
- You will be directed to a Customer Care Representative.

If you are unsure about any information on this checklist please contact ENMAX Customer Service at 403-310-2010.

Customer Assistance Programs

Calgary's Concerns

- “The bill adjustment process and inspection services provided are a considered a type of customer assistance program, with costs borne by the entire customer class.”
- “Some customers may be less motivated to monitor and remedy water leaks when receiving full adjustment.”



Customer Assistance Program Guelph

- A minimum water consumption increase of two times the average water consumption.
- A maximum of a 50 percent forgiveness adjustment.
- No financial cap for residential customers based on the developed adjustment criteria.
- A maximum financial cap for not-for-profits and institutional customers at \$5000.
- A limit of once per calendar year and two adjustments within a 10 year period.
- This program would not be retroactive once implemented.

Customer Assistance Programs Other Communities

- None had policy or bylaw
- All did in practice offer something.

Recommendations

1. That the Town follow the industry standard practice of billing for all water that goes through the meter.
2. Provide the public with access to a “high water consumption check list”.
3. For those customers that cannot find the leak we can provide a meter history report. In some cases we could provide assistance to find the leak, but not repair the leak.
4. A payment plan system be implemented for customers who receive a high consumption bill to give the consumer time to pay prior to implementing any penalties.
5. Should Council determine that a billing adjustment policy be implemented, the criteria should be residential customers only and for a maximum of three billing cycles. The policy should require that cases should be examined individually, as forgiveness should not be a normal practice but only applied in exceptional circumstances.

Questions

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