

Fairview Water Use and Billing Information - 9/10/2015

Summary: We have had record water use in Fairview during August, and residents are generally getting higher bills. A combination of higher water use and increased water rates are creating most of the higher bills.

Here are some things you can do to manage your consumption and water expenses.

- 1) Learn how to read your meter.
- 2) Check for leaks.
- 3) Most water consumption is in your landscape. Measure how much you use in a water cycle.
- 4) Understand the rate plan for water and how usage affects charges.

Most Fairview customers are experiencing higher water usage bills for August 2015. Fairview residents and businesses used over 135 million gallons of water for the August 2015 billing period; billing for August 2015 is a new Town record. From the resident feedback so far, we've learned: a) many customers are watering a lot more than last year with no North Texas Municipal Water District ("NTMWD") restrictions. b) water rates are higher so resident's bills are being compounded by higher use and water rates. c) residents have discovered water leaks on their property, and d) one billing cycle had a few extra days in cycle.

We are double-checking meters. As of September 9, 2015, the Town's Public Works Department is conducting an audit of 100% of the meters located in the Town's second billing cycle. These readings will be compared to the previous readings that occurred around August 24th. All of the spot-checks of water usage readings to date have been accurate.

We are double-checking supply/demand. We have reviewed the gallons billed versus the gallons pumped from NTMWD for the billing period July 7 to August 24 to insure we were not billing for more than we are pumping. The gallons billed are less than gallons pumped. Most of the cost of water is the rate we pay NTMWD.

We have improved communicating how bills are calculated. Some residents were not aware of usage surcharges that increase with consumption.

<http://www.fairviewtexas.org/index.php/departments/water-trash>

Almost all of our water meters in the Town of Fairview are manufactured by "Master Meter". They are radio read meters. The meter sends a 3G radio signal to a laptop computer that is installed in a Public Works vehicle. This allows the Town to get your water meter reading without ever actually opening your meter box. Also, this eliminates most meter reading mistakes.

The Town has suspended any late charges and will not be disconnecting any customers water for non-payment until the audit of the August billings have been completed and those residents that have requested additional testing is completed.

Additional Information – Checking for leaks, About your Meter, and Irrigation Use

1. How to Determine if there is a Leak in Your Water Line

If you are concerned that you were billed for unusually high usage, you may have a leak on your property. Small leaks such as toilet flapper valves, and leaking fittings, can over time, result in unusually high consumption. If you have an irrigation system, damaged heads, and leaks can greatly contribute to a higher water bill.

To determine whether or not you have a leak, locate your water meter (usually located near the street and near the property line). Turn off all the water in your house. Return to your water meter and observe the red dial in the center of the meter for several minutes. This is a pointer arm that rotates inside the meter. If all the water on your property is turned off, this red pointer arm should remain stationary. If the arm rotates in a clockwise direction with all the water points shut off (dishwasher, washing machine, faucets, etc.), then you have a leak on your property and a plumber or leak detection company should be contacted.

If you do detect a leak and have it repaired, you may bring this receipt to Town Hall and apply for a leak adjustment. Town of Fairview Ordinance 2008-3-4D states, "Water adjustments must be at least \$100 over the customer's average monthly bill. The customer, in addition to the average monthly bill, will pay the current North Texas Municipal Water District ("NTMWD") rate plus 50%. The customer must provide evidence that the leak was repaired prior to an adjustment being made. Only one month shall be considered and only one leak adjustment per calendar shall be allowed." Currently, the NTMWD rate plus 50% is \$3.17 per 1,000 gallons.

2. How to Read Your Water Meter

To read your meter simply open the water meter "can" and write down all the numbers in the white boxes. Most water meters have 4 white boxes with black numbers followed by two black boxes with white numbers, followed by a white zero surrounded in blue. These are displayed on the picture shown. Reading from Right to Left – the first black box with a white number represents 10's of gallons. A "7" in that box would represent 70 gallons. The second black box (reading from right to left) represents 100's of gallons. A "3" in the second box would represent 300 gallons. The first white box with black numbers would represent 1,000's of gallons. To determine your usage take a reading today. Write down all the numbers displayed. Read the meter again at about the same time the next day. Subtract the second days reading from the first. This will tell you how many gallons you used. Remember to add a zero at the end of your calculation since we do not measure units lower than 10 gallons. When you are billed we round our billing to the nearest 1,000 gallons.



3. Understand Your Irrigation Water Usage

As mentioned previously, locate your water meter “can” and write down all the numbers in the white boxes prior to the use of your irrigation system. After all the “cycles” and/or “stations” in your irrigation system has been completed, go back to your water meter “can” and write down all the number in the white. To determine your irrigation usage take the current reading and subtract the beginning reading and this will provide you with the total water usage during one day irrigation period. Then review your irrigation system to determine how many and/or what days your irrigation system is set to turn on, then multiple the usage per watering and the number of days scheduled to determine how much water is being used for irrigation purposes on a weekly basis. Then multiply this amount by 4 to determine the monthly water usage for irrigation purposes.

4. Other Resources Available to Fairview Customers

If you’ve determined you do not have a water leak within your water line and your irrigation usage does not correspond closely to your billed water usage, then the Town can possibly assist with other resources to help a resident and/or business understand their water usage.

If none of the resources above is useful, you can contact the Town and ask for a work order to be opened for Public Works to conduct a re-read of your meter. Along with this work order, the Utility Billing Department will ask Public Works to inspect the meter for any potential leaks while re-reading the meter. Since 94.3% of the Town’s water meters are equipped with the radio read technology, Public Works has the capability of electronically receiving a daily history of the water usage.

If customers are still unsatisfied with the results, there is an option to have the water meter pulled and sent off to an independent 3rd party vendor to be tested. If the water meter test results indicates the meter is working properly, the customer will be billed \$75 for those services. Should a water meter be determined bad or fails testing, then the Town will work with the customer to determine a “fair” billing for that month. Generally, this is calculated using past billings and determining an average bill.

5. Contacts for Utility Billing

Should you need to contact the Town concerning your utility bill, you may do so by contacting the Utility Billing Department at 972-886-4242. Please be advised that the Utility Billing Department is experiencing increased volume of telephone calls at this time. If you are unable to reach someone in the Utility Billing Department and not able to leave a voice message, please contact them at following email address utilitybilling@fairviewtexas.org. A Town representative will be returning your call or email as soon as possible.

RECENT PRESS COVERAGE OF AREA WATER BILLS

Water bills surge for many in cities north, east of Dallas

The following article appeared in the Dallas Morning News on August 29, 2015 and was updated on August 30, 2015:

By KRISTEN TAKETA

Dallas Morning News

Published: 29 August 2015 11:10 PM

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Why are water bills so unusually high this month?

Your first look at where Dallas could sink water parks meant to replace city swimming pools. If you conserve water for a year and a half, you'd think you'd end up with a smaller water bill.

But many residents north and east of Dallas are now seeing that, even after months of curbing water use, their costs are still going up because of a series of water rate increases over the past few years.

And many cities will raise them again this fall.

The pain of higher water rates has been particularly felt in recent months because, for the first time in a while, residents can and are using a lot more water. Residents can water their lawns twice a week instead of just twice a month after the North Texas Municipal Water District eased drought restrictions in May. They're using more water and paying more for it.

Richardson resident Elise Whitmire has already seen her water bill more than triple from \$80 to \$310 this month when she increased her water use.

"I think nobody realized the rates went up in the past few years," Whitmire said. "I'm just surprised they got away with raising it."

Cities north and east of Dallas are wrapping up deliberations on their next budgets, many of which include water and sewer rate increases of about 10 percent.

Officials say they have no choice but to collect more, as the NTMWD will again charge its member cities more to pay for needed infrastructure projects.

This year, it's expected to be an 11.2 percent increase. The water district has already raised rates by at least 10 percent the last three years.

"The only thing we have that we can do is increase the rate that we pass on to our customers," said Karen Rhodes-Whitley, budget director for Plano, which has 10 percent increases in both water and sewer rates planned for its upcoming budget.

In the past couple of years, cities such as McKinney have sometimes been able to absorb some of the increased water costs.

But after being dealt rate increases from NTMWD in consecutive years, McKinney has run out of options, said finance director Rodney Rhodes. This is the first year McKinney will pass its entire 11 percent water cost increase to residents and businesses, he said.

Interim City Manager Tom Muehlenbeck acknowledges that residents aren't happy about the situation.

"We discuss it every year. You ask them, 'Well, what are the alternatives?' And I think that's when it comes home pretty quickly," Muehlenbeck said.

The 13 member cities of the North Texas Municipal Water District are Allen, Farmersville, Forney, Frisco, Garland, McKinney, Mesquite, Princeton, Plano, Richardson, Rockwall, Royse City and Wylie.

The cities are some of the fastest-growing in the country, and with more people comes a need for more water.

Especially in a drought-stricken state like Texas, that water doesn't come without investing hundreds of millions in mammoth new projects to provide more water, said NTMWD Executive Director Tom Kula.

"It's kind of a big duh. Of course rates are going to go up," said Steve Massey, community services director for Allen, which will raise its water and sewer rate by about 6 percent next year. "What that does is help ensure the continuity of the water supply when we have a drought."

The NTMWD is planning the \$1 billion Lower Bois D'Arc Creek Reservoir, the first reservoir to be built in Texas in three decades.

There's also a \$100 million pump station for the Trinity River and dredging projects for Lakes Lavon and Chapman. And the district is still paying for the \$300 million pipeline extension needed after zebra mussels invaded Lake Texoma.

On top of that, NTMWD and cities find themselves with less money because the water district had imposed years of water conservation restrictions to have enough water to supply.

They saved water, but they also sold less water and earned less revenue to pay for needed costs like maintenance of aging infrastructure, said Don Magner, Richardson's first assistant city manager. Richardson is expected to raise water rates 8 percent this year.

And under NTMWD's take-or-pay system, member cities always have to pay for a set amount of water, no matter how much they conserve.

Cities have no choice except to raise water rates, but NTMWD doesn't either.

At this rate, cities won't stop seeing at least 10 percent rate increases for another five years, according to current NTMWD projections.

"We do recognize the challenges they are facing of less revenues," Kula said. "At the same time we've got to continue to pay for and build projects in the future. It's a conundrum. There's no way getting around it."