



Council Policy

Council Policy No.:	CP2017-006
Council Policy Name:	High Bill Adjustment Policy
Date Approved by Council:	April 18, 2017
Date revision approved by Council:	
Related SOP, Management Directive, Council Policy, Forms	

Policy Statement and Rationale:

This Policy establishes the expectations of Council relating to a high bill inquiry.

Scope:

This policy covers various types of high consumption water and wastewater bills and how to address customer concerns.

Policy:

1.0 Definitions

- 1.1 “**High Bill**” is a bill that is 2 x the normal consumption for the same period in the previous year based upon average daily consumption.
- 1.2 “**Income Producing Residential Property**” means where the property owner registered on title is different than the occupant.
- 1.3 “**Leak**” means an unintentional water loss caused by broken and/or malfunctioning plumbing fixtures and/or pipes within a residence or building. A leak occurs when there is a failure on the plumbing system to do what it was designed to do.
- 1.4 “**Not-for-profit**” means Not-for-profit corporations incorporated under the Ontario Corporations Act as organizations that carry on activities without the purpose of gain for its members and any profits for the corporation.
- 1.5 “**Unoccupied**” means an unoccupied dwelling and/or building is a dwelling and/or building in which occupants are absent from the property for a time period of seventy-two (72) hours or more, due to such matters as vacations or prolonged illness.

- 1.6 **“Vacant”** means regardless of the presence of furnishings, a vacant dwelling and/or building means the occupants have moved out with no intent to return. A newly constructed dwelling and/or building is also considered to be vacant after it is completed and before the occupants move in. A dwelling and/or building is also vacant when the occupants move out and before any new occupant moves in.

2.0 General

- 2.1 A high bill can be a result of:

- A reading error
- A period of increased consumption
- An estimated bill that is higher than the actual consumption
- A catch up bill following one or more estimated bills
- A final meter reading from an existing meter where a new water meter is being installed
- Obvious or hidden leaks
- A malfunctioning water meter
- Installation of a new meter
- Mis-matching of registers and meters

- 2.2 Pipes and infrastructure after a water meter are on private property and is not a municipal responsibility.

- 2.3 Plumbing must be in compliance with government regulations.

- 2.4 By-law 2011-260, Consolidated Water and Wastewater Service, section 10.03(h) provides authority to adjust accounts where the meter is not registering or not registering correctly.

- 2.5 Estimated readings are used where an actual reading cannot be obtained due to:

- Staff availability
- No reading available due to faulty equipment



- 2.6 Estimated readings will not be used when an actual water meter reading is available is higher than a normal reading as it masks potential issues that may not be identified until subsequent bills.
- 2.7 An estimated reading is identified on the bill.
- 2.8 Staff shall assist the customer in identifying the cause of a high bill.
- 2.9 No adjustment to an account will be provided when:

- Water loss due to a leak in an irrigation system
- Water loss is due to theft, vandalism or construction damage as the responsibility to resolve these issues lies with the customer
- A leak was caused by a third party from whom the customer is able to recover their costs
- A dwelling and/or building is Unoccupied and/or Vacant for 72 hours or more
- Costs can be recovered through an insurance claim

3.0 A Reading Error

- 3.1 Occasionally a reading error will occur and result in a higher than normal bill for a customer. When this happens the correct reading shall be entered and the customer will be notified of the adjustment if applicable.
- 3.2 Where the reading error was a prior period resulting in a low bill and then a higher bill in the subsequent billing cycle the customer will be provided the details of the error, and if requested, will be provided an extended period of time to pay the higher bill without late payment charges. Repayments should not extend beyond 6 months.

4.0 Period of Increased Consumption

- 4.1 Reasons for periods of increased consumption include but are not limited to:
- Seasonal Use:
 - Watering of sod, gardening
 - Filling of swimming pools or whirlpools



- Washing vehicles
- Use of irrigation systems
- Building of ice rinks
- Visitors
- Increase in the number of days in the billing period
- Neglect of private property

4.2 These uses do not constitute a reason for an investigation of a high bill.

5.0 Estimated Bill Higher than Actual Consumption

5.1 An account that has been estimated shall be adjusted to reflect actual consumption:

- When the customer provides the City with a meter reading when estimated readings were used for billing purposes; or
- After the water meter and remote reading equipment has been inspected and repaired or replaced in the case of faulty readings and notices have been left for repair.

5.2 If there is no response to the first request to inspect and repair or replace within 90 days estimates will continue.

5.3 If it is determined when the meter is inspected and repaired or replaced, that the meter was malfunctioning, estimates shall remain as billed unless the estimate is not comparable to normal usage for historical billing periods where actual reads were available.

6.0 Catch Up Bill

6.1 When previous bills have been estimated and the subsequent bill is an actual reading no adjustment shall be provided.

6.2 Where the catch up bill is more than two times the normal consumption based on the 5 year average, if requested, an extended period of time to pay the higher bill without late payment charges will be provided. Repayments should not extend beyond 6 months.

7.0 Final Meter Reading from Replaced Water Meter



7.1 Where there is a discrepancy between the outside reader and the water meter and the reading is based upon the Touch Read Technology (TRT) the discrepancy could be a result of communication error between the water meter and the TRT device due to environmental factors.

7.2 Where the difference results in a water bill of more than 2 times difference than the daily average for the previous 5 years, the adjustment calculation used in relation to Section 8.0 will be applied.

8.0 Obvious or Hidden Leaks

8.1 Obvious leaks include but are not limited to:

- Dripping taps
- Water softeners continually cycling
- Toilet tanks

8.2 Hidden leaks include but are not limited to:

- Irrigation systems
- Toilet tanks
- Icemakers
- Water powered sump pumps

8.3 This section does not apply to commercial, industrial, multi-residential (as identified by assessment property classification) and income producing residential properties or leaks as a result of irrigation systems.

8.4 Reasonable effort to locate the leak and initiate repairs must be taken by the customer within 30 calendar days upon notification from the City of increased water usage.

8.5 Notification may include, but is not limited to:

- Water billing with higher than historical average consumption
- A written notice delivered to the owner or occupant
- A courtesy phone call



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- 8.6 To qualify for an adjustment water usage must exceed 2 times (200%) the average daily consumption of the similar period from the previous 5 years (not including estimated readings).
- If history is not available for the previous 5 years, available history will be used in the calculation.
 - If no history is available the cubic metres used in the calculation of the flat rate water charges will be used as the average.
- 8.7 The customer must complete the Water Leak Adjustment Request Form and provide sufficient documentation of repairs.
- 8.8 Notification to the City is required within 14 calendar days after the date of the final repair(s).
- 8.9 The customer's account must be in good standing at the time of submission.
- 8.10 The adjustment shall be in the form of a credit applied to the account.
- 8.11 Adjustments shall be issued after repairs have been completed and verification water usage at the location has returned to normal.
- 8.12 Adjustments shall only be made for the bill in question and up to the time a meter reading was obtained verifying the problem has been resolved but not to exceed 30 days from the due date of the bill in question.
- 8.13 Failure to request a review within 60 days of initially being notified of the leak waives the customer's opportunity for an adjustment.
- 8.14 The customer is consenting to the City or its representative the right of access to the property for the purpose of an inspection to determine whether the leak was repaired within the required timeframe.
- 8.15 Customers must pay the average consumption for each month adjusted plus 50% of the amount above the average consumption for water charges.
- 8.16 A maximum of 5 of months will be adjusted.
- 8.17 Wastewater reductions will be calculated in the same manner.
- 9.0 Malfunctioning Water Meter**
- 9.1 If a water meter has been sent for testing and it has been determined the meter has been over registering and exceeding the limits established in By-law 2011-



260 the water bill in question shall be recalculated to reflect the amount of the overcharge or where a recalculation cannot be reasonably made the charge shall be adjusted to reflect the flat rate water and/or sewer charges as defined by By-law.

10.0 Installation of a New Water Meter

- 10.1 Old water meters may not capture consumption due to under or un-registering the consumption and the new water meter will now be accurately measuring the consumption.
- 10.2 No adjustment will be made as the water meter is correctly measuring the water consumed at the property.

11.0 Mismatching of Registers and Water Meters

- 11.1 Water meters and registers are matched when delivered to the City and accounts are set up indicating the unit of measure for billing purposes.
- 11.2 When it has been identified the register attached to the water meter does not match the size of the water meter or the unit of measure is incorrect the situation will be corrected.
- 11.3 Where it has been identified the unit of measure has been recorded incorrectly the situation will be corrected and adjustments made.
- 11.4 If the mismatch results in a credit to the property owner the account will be adjusted back to the date of the installation of the water meter.
- 11.5 If the mismatch is in favour of the municipality an adjustment will be made for the previous 2 year period.

12.0 Unexplained Sudden Large Increase

- 12.1 Occasionally there is increased consumption that cannot be explained. To qualify for an adjustment calculated under Section 8 above, the following is required:
 - Consumption is two or more times greater than the historical daily average consumption for the property
 - Water meter has been tested and found to be measuring water consumption within prescribed standards for accuracy and is otherwise free from defects that could affect the measuring of water consumption; and no other city



activity could have reasonably caused, in the determination of the Director of Public Works or designate, the increase in recorded water consumption.

- The increase in recorded water consumption, in the determination of Director of Public Works or designate cannot reasonably be attributed to an act or omission of the customer, an occupant of the property or a person within the customer's or occupant's control; or a leak or other defect in the private plumbing system of the customer's property.
- The customer shall provide to the City, at the customer's cost, written verification from a licensed plumbing contract, that the private plumbing system of the property is free from leaks or other defects that may affect water consumption and that upon careful inspection of the system there are no other factors that may explain the increased consumption.
- Customer shall provide the City any documentation or other information in the customer's possession or knowledge in respect to the private plumbing system for the subject property, occupants of the subject property and the customer's water consumption during the billing period in question as the City may request.

12.2 City staff may inspect the subject property

12.3 In this situation the cost of the meter inspection will be returned to the customer.

13.0 Payments

13.1 There is no extension of the due date or the time for paying water and/or wastewater bills because of a pending adjustment request.

13.2 Late payment charges will only be adjusted in relation to the adjustment provided for the leak or where readings have been estimated for an extended period of time resulting in a large reconciliation bill.

14.0 Adjustment Cap

14.1 Adjustments for not-for-profits and institutional customers will be capped at \$5,000.

14.2 There is no adjustment cap for residential customers.

14.3 The City will not process leak adjustment where the adjustment amount is calculated to be less than \$50.00.

15.0 Frequency of Adjustments



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- 15.1 Property owners are responsible for ensuring there is no repetition of this occurrence. As such, only one leak adjustment per property during the term of the applicant's ownership of the property shall be permitted.

Revision History:

Proposed Date of Review:

Revision	Date	Description of changes	Requested By
0.0	[Date]	Initial Release	