

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WATER UTILITY

Clear Lake has an active program for water meter replacement. The meter replacement program is **low cost** to the homeowner. We are attempting to update old meters with a touch read meter. The new meter will assist in reducing human error. The meter has a remote on the outside of the house with a black button, which when touched by a special reader, reads the actual meter in the basement. The old meters had a separate remote that ran independent from the inside meter.

If you receive a notice requesting you to call City Hall to set up an appointment to change your meter, please respond. The appointment takes about half an hour and someone will need to be home at the time. If you are questioning your water usage and have an old meter, please call City Hall and we will make an appointment to check your usage.

OK, my reading checks out. How did I use so much more water?

During the summer, many homeowners water their lawn frequently. While the lawn may look nice, it does come at a cost. A garden hose will dispense up to 600 gallons in two hours. If the summer is dry, usage can easily double over the summer quarter.

A toilet that leaks is another common cause for a noticeable usage increase. A good way to check is to put some food coloring in the back of the tank, wait a few minutes, and then check the bowl. If the food coloring appears in the bowl, then you know that there isn't a tight seal and water is circulating through the toilet.

Can a leaking toilet really go through that much water?

A leaking toilet can go through a thousand gallons per day! A gallon per minute leak in a toilet will run 1,440 gallons per day, 43,000 gallons per month. Two things that we look for on a toilet leak is water going over the overflow tube because the tank level is set too high, and water leaking past the bottom flap. This will show up as a small trickle that we listen for when we take the tank lid off. When this happens, the homeowner will hear water run for a short period of time as the tank refills.

Why does my bill show zero usage?

Here again, there are two main reasons:

- the meter stopped
- no reading was taken

To find out what the reason is, call Utility Billing at (641) 357-5267 and they can help you to determine what happened.

Why would a reading not be taken?

The meter reader might not have been able to get at your outside reader. This can happen if the outside reader is under too much snow, behind a fence and/or gate, or if a large dog is loose in the yard. To prevent this from happening, keep a clear path to the outside reader and keep any dogs from running loose.

Another reason that a reading might not have been taken is the meter reader entered a comment in the hand-held computer instead of a reading. This would be done if the outside reader needed to be moved to a more accessible side of the house. Since the computer will only accept a reading **or** a comment, the meter reader cannot enter a reading when he or she enters a comment to move the meter.

If you would like your outside reader moved to a more accessible side of your house, call the Water Department at (641) 357-3911 between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

What should I do if my meter is stopped?

Contact the Water Department at (641) 357-3911 between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. If necessary, the Water Department will set up an appointment to come to your house and repair or replace your meter. If you are calling between 4:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., call Utility Billing at (641) 357-5267 and they will contact the Water Department for you.

My meter was replaced and now I'm using more water. Is my new meter running fast?

No. Most likely the old meter was slowing down. The meters have a dial similar to a paddle wheel. The dial will only turn as fast as the water turns it. As a meter gets old, it could corrode and slowly grind to a halt. Therefore, an old meter could actually be registering less water than is actually used.

My bill shows zero usage. What am I being billed for?

Your utility bill consists of variable and fixed charges. The variable charges cover the costs for the water used. The fixed charges cover the costs the City incurs to provide water service that do not vary with the amount of water used. Examples of fixed costs are maintenance of the infrastructure (water mains, storm sewer, sanitary sewer, pumping stations, etc.) street sweeping, labor, vehicles and maintenance of water meters.

The fixed charges include service fees for water and sanitary sewer, storm water, and a landfill fee.

A few words about the meter reading...

The reading on the water meter works the same way the odometer on your car. If you want to find out how far it is from your house to the store, you look at your car's odometer before you

leave your house and after you arrive at the store. The difference between the two mileages is the distance. We calculate your water usage the same way: new reading - old reading = usage.

A problem occurs if the new reading is incorrect. It doesn't happen often, but occasionally the meter reader will record the wrong reading. If the reading is higher than it should be, the usage will also be higher, and, as a result, the utility bill will be higher.

How can I check my meter reading?

When you check your reading, it should be higher than the reading taken by the meter reader. If your reading is *lower* than the meter reader's, then we know that we recorded the wrong reading and we can adjust your bill to reflect the correct reading. If your reading is *higher* than the meter reader's, then we have to assume that the reading we recorded was correct, and that amount of water did pass through the meter. If you contact the Utility Billing Clerk at (641) 357-5267, she can schedule with the Water Department personnel a mutually convenient time to come to your home and investigate the discrepancy in the reading.

What is an outside reader?

The outside reader is a small box that the meter reader actually reads. It is connected to the inside meter by an electrical wire. The inside meter sends electrical signals to the outside reader whenever the dial should turn over.

Where are my meter and outside reader located?

Meter location varies from house to house, but is usually in the basement or utility area. The outside reader is located near the foundation on the outside of the house.

If you are checking your reading, make sure that you are reading the water meter and not a gas or electrical meter. The water meter should have a reading similar to the current reading that is on the water bill. If you cannot determine which meter is for water, call Utility Billing at (641) 357-5267.

Why do I have a sewer charge on my City of Clear Lake bill and also receive a bill from the Clear Lake Sanitary District each month?

The sewer charge on your City of Clear Lake bill is for the maintenance of the sewer lines within the City of Clear Lake city limits. The Clear Lake Sanitary District is for the treatment of the sewage at the Sanitary District treatment plant.

If you have any additional questions please contact the Utility Billing Department at 641-357-5267.