

Frequently Asked Questions about water & sewer bills

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
- It could be the result of a "catch-up" bill, if your meter was misread or estimated on the previous bill it could result in higher usage and charge when an accurate or actual reading was obtained

If you find that none of your toilets, sinks, water heater, ice maker, faucets or outside connections are leaking, you may wish for someone from the water department to check the meter. We cannot go inside the home unless your meter is located inside. You do not have to be home at the time we check the meter. After the work order has been completed and brought back into the office you can call us for the results.

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 greatly 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 accurate 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 resulting in a charge of \$71.71 at the current rates.

How often will I receive a water/sewer bill?

You will receive a bill each month, the city is divided into 4 sections each having their own billing and due date. The breakdown is as follows:

Bills mailed 5th of each month are due the 21st.

Bills mailed 12th of each month are due the 28th.

Bills mailed 21st of each month are due the 7th.

Bills mailed 28th of each month are due the 14th.

We strive to read the meter each month, however at times the occasion arises that we must estimate a reading. Some of those instances could be freezing temperatures (to prevent the meter from freezing we do not open tiles if temperature is 15 or below). Cars parked on top of the meter or excessive snow covering the meter lid. In these instances an estimated reading will take place. The system will automatically calculate a usage based over the previous 3 months usage. If the estimate is too high, when an actual reading is obtained (usually the following month) the system will give you back credit for any over-estimated usage. If the estimated usage is too low, it could result in a higher usage the following month.

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 there be someone 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 chose to have us turn the water off and finalize the account, you must sign back up for the service and pay a \$25.00 activation fee. You will not incur any billings after the service has been terminated and a final bill issued.
- 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 520 Jackson Ave, Charleston IL. Business hours are M - F 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. The office is closed on all major holidays. We will accept check, cash or debit/credit card in the office.
- Drive up located in the back parking lot at City Hall, enter off of 5th St through parking lot to kiosk directly behind City Hall. Put payment in canister (cash or check only) we can send a receipt out if needed.
- Automatic bank draft - forms are available in the office or you can print one off the website: www.charlestonillinois.org 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.charlestonillinois.org follow the links to make payment. You will need your water/sewer bill account number and the amount due. This is a free service to you.
- Credit/Debit card over the phone: 1-(877)-455-3729. You will also need your account number and amount due. Follow the prompts. It will ask you to state what you are paying for, please respond "Municipality" it will also ask what town or city you are paying for, respond with "City of Charleston". This is also a free service. We are unable to accept

debit/credit card payments over the phone in the billing office.

- Drop boxes are available 24 hours a day at the following locations:
 1. Parking lot at City Hall by drive up kiosk.
 2. First Mid Ill Bank & Trust on Lincoln Ave - located in parking lot by mailboxes.
 3. Sav-a-lot Store on Lincoln Ave - located in parking lot
 4. Post Office - located in alley beside mailbox drop off between Huck's and Post Office.
 5. EIU Union on campus, inside building by ticket office.
 6. University Court on 9th St on EIU campus, this is a walk up located outside the UC office.

Payments will be picked up each business day at 8:00 am, any payments deposited after 8:00 am will be picked up the following business day.

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 (217) 345-8430 during normal business hours and we can send someone out to shut water off at the meter. If emergency should occur after normal business hours, please call (217) 345-2977 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 (217) 345-8430 and inform staff of problem. We will direct your call to the appropriate department. After hours call (217) 345-2977.

Leaks occurring at any place **after** our meter will be the owner responsibility. If the leak results in a higher than usual water bill

we do allow a once a year adjustment if the appropriate paperwork is presented in this office. Adjustments will be handled by averaging the previous 3 months usage. You must pay the average bill plus $\frac{1}{2}$ of the unadjusted bill that reflects the leak.

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 (217) 345-8430 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.