

# Common Causes of High Water Bills

An unusually high water bill is most often caused by a leak or change in water use. Some common causes of high water bills include:

- A leaking toilet, or a toilet that continues to run after being flushed (see below)
- A dripping faucet; a faucet drip can waste 20 gallons of water a day or more
- Filling or topping off a swimming pool or hot tub
- Watering the lawn, new grass, or trees; also check for an open hose spigots
- Humidifiers attached to the furnace that are not adjusted or working correctly
- Sump pumps that have water powered back up
- Kids home for summer vacations or school holidays; guests
- Water-cooled air conditioners
- A broken water pipe or obvious leak; check the pipes in the basement or crawl space; check the water
- Water softener problems – cycles continuously
- Running the water to avoid freezing water pipes during cold weather

Learning how to save water at home is very important because a typical family of four uses 40-50 gallons of water per person per day or 160–200 gallons for one day. The largest water users are the toilets, clothes washer and showers, accounting for about two-thirds of the water used in an average household. Toilets use up to 27% of the household water supply while clothes washers use 20.9% and showers account for 17.3%. Faucets account for about 15.3% and leaks account for 13.8% of a family's water use. Dishwashers, baths, and other things account for the remaining water use. Typically water consumption is higher during the summer due to watering of lawns, pools, gardening and pressure washing homes and patios.

## Things to check if you get a bill that's higher than usual

### *Changes in your water use*

Did you have house guests, water your lawn more than usual, or do anything else out of the ordinary? If so, this may account for an increase in your water bill.

### *Check for leaks*

Leaks, whether unseen or unfixed, can waste hundreds and even thousands of gallons of water. It is important to routinely check your plumbing and home for leaky faucets, toilets, and outside taps and irrigation lines.

### *Outdoor and underground leaks*

Leaks can also occur in harder to find places, such as under your home, crawl spaces. Also, check outdoor spigots and irrigation systems, and look for wet spots in your yard, which may indicate a leak.

### *Toilet and faucet leaks*

**The most common cause for a high water bill is running water from your toilet.** A continuously running toilet can waste up to 200 gallons a day or more depending on the volume flow down the drain. This can cause a terrible increase to a family's typical water use, so fix toilet leaks as soon as possible. Some leaks are easy to find, such as a dripping faucet or running toilet. You can usually hear a running toilet, **but not always.**

## Do-it-yourself Toilet Assessment

First check for the most common leak: a deteriorated or defected flush valve (flapper) ball at the bottom of the toilet tank. If it does not make a tight seal water will leak into the toilet bowl. To check for a leaky toilet follow steps 1 thru 4:

1-Take the lid off of the tank behind the bowl, flush then wait for it to fully refill.

2-Put a few drops of dye or a colored dye tablet (food coloring works well) in the tank.

3-Wait at least 20 minutes; longer if you suspect it is a small leak.

4-If there is any color in the toilet bowl, there is a leak.

The second most common type of leak has to do with an improperly adjusted or broken fill (ballcock) valve. To check for this take the lid off of the toilet tank, flush, and see if water is draining into the overflow tubes when the tank is full.

## Irrigation Systems

During the summer irrigation systems are a common source of high water use. Watering times generally double during the summer months compared to the winter. Automated irrigation systems should be checked regularly to be sure they are functioning properly and have no leaks or broken sprinkler heads. If a sprinkler valve sticks on, it could waste an extremely large quantity of water. The irrigation timer may not be programmed properly; i.e., sprinklers are watering too often and/or for too long. Reprogramming may be necessary if the power has been off.

## Water Softeners

Customers with water softeners have higher water bills due to the regeneration or backwash cycles their systems go through. The systems are preset to regenerate or backwash on a regular basis. The systems will use water to clean the filter media and discharge the wastewater into the ground next to the system. **There are times when these systems will get stuck in a cycle which will cause higher water use.**

## What Can I do if My Bill is Unusually High?

If you receive a bill that you feel is too high, check over the common causes listed above. This may help to pinpoint the source of the high bill. Most often, the City's utility billing program will detect unusually high bills, and the City will set up an appointment to send our Department of Public Works staff out to check the meter and the property for a leak. If you feel that your bill is too high and you have not been contacted by the City about it, call (608) 429-3054. City staff will schedule for the meter reading to be rechecked. If the meter reading is checked and found to be accurate, you may need to contact a plumber or other professional to help determine the source of a leak. Property owners are responsible for all private service water lines from the public water main to the residence and for leaks inside the home.