

# Common Causes of High Water Bills - and How to Prevent Them

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

- A leaking toilet, or a toilet that continues to run after being flushed
- A broken water pipe or a leak in the water heater
- A dripping faucet or an open outside spigot
- Filling or topping off a swimming pool
- Watering the lawn, new grass, or trees
- Water-cooled air conditioners or furnace humidifiers
- A water softener that cycles continuously
- Running the water continuously to avoid freezing water pipes in cold weather.
- A “catch-up” bill – when you are billed for previously used but unbilled water, after it is discovered that your outside reading device was not reflecting the full usage recorded on the inside water meter

## Things to Check if you get a Water Bill that is higher than usual

### Check for leaks –

Leaks, whether seen or 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.

- **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 hundreds of gallons a day or more depending on the volume flow down the drain. This can cause a huge increase to your typical water use, so you will want to fix your toilet as soon as you detect a leak. Some leaks are easy to find, such as a dripping faucet or running toilet. You can usually hear a running toilet, but not always!
- **Outdoor and Underground Leaks** – Leaks can also occur in harder to find places, such as under your home and in crawl spaces. Also, check outdoor spigots and irrigation systems, and look for wet spots in your yard which may indicate a leak.

### Changes in your water use –

Did you have house guests, water your lawn more than usual, or do anything out of the ordinary? Typically, summertime water use is higher than winter use since we are outside more, and maintaining our yards more by watering the lawn, garden, and trees.

### Catch-up water bill –

Avoid a “catch-up” bill by reading your inside meter weekly and comparing it to your quarterly bill. Let the City know if your meter reading is notably less than for the same time period as the end read on your bill. The City usually identifies unbilled water usage when your meter is replaced. If you receive a catch-up bill and it is substantially larger than your normal bill, call the water staff and ask if you qualify to pay the catch-up bill in installments. There is a good chance that you qualify.

## Do-it-Yourself Toilet Assessment

There are two common issues that occur with failing toilets –

- The most common type of leak is a deteriorated and/or defective Flush Valve (flapper) ball – If the flapper does not make a tight seal with the bottom of the tank, water will leak into the toilet bowl, which may or may not be detectable upon casual observation. Check your toilet using these steps:
  1. Take the lid off of the tank behind the bowl, flush the toilet, and wait for it to fully refill.
  2. Put a few drops of food coloring or a colored dye tablet in the tank.
    - The Treasurer's office has dye tablets available for your use if you stop by.
  3. Wait one to three hours – the longer time is if you suspect yours is a small leak.
  4. If there is any color in the toilet bowl, you have a leak.
- The second most common type of leak is an improperly adjusted or broken fill (ballcock) valve. You can check for this by taking the lid off of the toilet tank, flushing, and seeing if water is draining into the overflow tubes when the tank is full.

The following table shows the amount of water that can be lost (and billed to your account) when you have a leak and it goes unfixed:

A continuous leak from a hole this size would, over a three month period, waste water in the amount shown below.					
Streams Diameter at 50 psi		Gallons		Daily Average	
Inches	MM				
1/4"	6.5	1,181,000		13,122	
3/16"	4.8	652,000		7,244	
1/8"	3.2	296,000		3,288	
1/16"	1.6	74,000		822	

## Be a Good Consumer and Use Water Wisely

The best way to prevent a high water bill is to be a good consumer by:

- **Tracking your own use!** Once a week, write down your water meter reading on your calendar. The quicker you can identify a problem, the quicker you can get it fixed and avoid a high bill.
- Asking the water department for help in identifying your meter and how to read it if you don't know how. We are here to help you understand your water use and its related bill!
- Reading available literature through the AWWA, the EPA, your local library, and other organizations on effective ways to conserve water throughout your home.
- Attempting to conserve water in the ways that make most sense for your family and home.