Potential 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 additional information below
- A dripping faucet; a faucet drip can waste 20 gallons of water a day or more
- Filling or topping off a swimming pool
- Watering the lawn, new grass, or trees; also check for an open hose bib
- 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 crawlspace; the water heater could also be leaking
- Water softener problems – cycles continuously or too frequently
- Running the water to avoid freezing water pipes during cold weather

Generally, water consumption is higher during the summer due to watering of lawns, filling pools, and gardening. Here are a few 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 in the last few months that uses a lot of water? 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.

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. That can double a family's typical water use, so toilet leaks should be fixed 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**.

Outdoor and underground leaks

Leaks can also occur in harder to find places, such as under your house or in the service line between your water meter and your home. Check outdoor spigots and crawl spaces, and look for wet spots in your yard, which may indicate a leak.

Things You Can Do

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 this:

- Take the lid off of the tank behind the bowl.
- Put a few drops of dye or a colored dye tablet (available at some hardware stores, or at the Municipal Center) in the tank.
- Wait at least 20 minutes; longer if you suspect it is a small leak.
- If you see the color come through to 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. 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 your 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. Also, if the timer is set to cycle too often, more water will definitely be used. If you suspect your water softener is cycling too much, check your read on your water meter (located in your house, usually by the water heater) before you go to bed at night, and then again when you get up in the morning. Track it for a week and see how often the softener is cycling and adjust accordingly.

Waste per quarter at 60 psi water pressure			
Diameter of stream		Gallons	Cubic Feet
◯	1/4"	1,181,500	158,000
◯	3/16"	666,000	89,031
◯	1/8"	296,000	39,400
◯	1/16"	74,000	9,850
↑	*A continuous leak from a hole this size would, over a three month period, waste water in the amounts shown above.*		