



CITY OF LAWRENCE UTILITY NEWS

QUESTION: DID THE UTILITY ADD ADDITIONAL USAGE TO FEBRUARY BILLS?

I would like to reiterate what has been explained to news outlets, customers and elected city officials about the concern over higher February bills. Many customers questioned increased water usage resulting in larger bills. While February bills did appear higher, January bills, for most, were lower than average. I will not be addressing the issue as it relates to the lower than normal bill, as that did not seem to trouble anyone. There is however, a simple explanation of what caused the difference in billed amounts.

Although our goal is to stay consistent with the monthly meter read dates resulting in a steady usage period and comparable billed amounts, December 2019 presented a challenge due to the Billing Of-

fice closure for the holidays. That said, instead of 8 weeks of usage billed in two 4-week periods, the 8 weeks had to split into a 3-week (Jan. bill) and a 5-week usage period (Feb. bill). Regardless of how the weeks divided, January and February still billed for 8 weeks of combined total water usage.

In hindsight, it would have been helpful to alert customers of the deviation from the original meter read dates to prepare for a difference in billing. I apologize, as I did not realize the confusion it would invoke. We are taking steps to identify when similar situations may occur in the future and will provide advance notice to affected customers should a conflict present itself again.

Even though the altered read date did have some impact on billing, another thing to consider in regards to higher February bills is that consumption trends typically rise during the holiday season. Families spend more time at home, have guests and generally use more water. In addition, although it does not appear to be the biggest factor for the fluctuation in billed amounts, all consumption measured after January 1, 2020 would be billed the new rate. Again, things to consider when viewing your bill.

We strive to maintain billing accuracy with consistent, actual monthly meter readings. There are times that, as happened in December, scheduled meter read dates have to be altered for operational reasons. I hope this helps you to understand the variation of the billed amounts for January and February.

LAWRENCE UTILITIES INSTALLING NEW METERS

The new meters we install are equipped with a cellular endpoint that has a "profiling capability". This is a fancy term saying the meter records the usage, which can be downloaded for review. This profiled data records daily/hourly usage for up to 6 months. Although it cannot determine how the water

was used, the profiled data can be very beneficial in helping customers pinpoint potential leaks or other issues, such as a malfunctioning water-using appliance, like a toilet or a softener. In essence, every gallon billed to the customer is accounted for in the profiled data report.

Meters equipped with these cellular endpoints also get the most benefit from the Eye on Water app. More information on this app can be found below. Please note that newer meters do a much better job of capturing water flow across all ranges of use (low, medium and high) and this could have an impact on your bill, albeit relatively minor.

METER ACCURACY

LU does not put any meter into service unless it passes meter accuracy testing. In addition, LU offers meter accuracy tests to customers

still disputing their billed consumption. This service is provided free of charge. It is time consuming for the customer however, who is re-

quired to observe the test as well as the removal and reinstallation of the meter. This accuracy test is performed in compliance with AWWA standards using calibrated equipment.

THERE IS NO WAY I HAVE USED THAT MUCH WATER. HELP!

We recommend customers routinely check toilets for proper operation, including the flapper valve and fill tube assemblies.

We have also seen water softeners stuck in backwash or regeneration mode, which will run constantly.

Automatic humidifiers attached to furnaces sometimes do not shut off as scheduled, resulting in a constant flow of water. In addition,

over the last few years, we have seen an increase in the number of water-powered backup sump



pumps failing, using considerable amounts of water. All of these and other water-consuming devices can malfunction, causing an unexpected increase in your water bill.

Keep in mind, Lawrence Utilities is not responsible for customer plumbing. Again, we would encourage customers to sign up for the Eye on Water App and be pro-active at the first sign of a higher than average bill.

Be aware and check your bills monthly if you do not wish to download the app.

I FOUND A LEAK! CAN YOU LOWER MY BILL?

The sewer portion of a residential bill can be adjusted if it is determined that the leaked water did not enter the customer's sanitary sewer

system. After the repair is complete and the consumption has dropped back to normal, the customer can submit the repair receipt along with

a letter identifying the problem and request a sewer adjustment. Under the rules established by the Utility Services Board, LU does not offer adjustments for leaks on the water portion of the bill.

EYE ON WATER: A TOOL TO HELP MONITOR YOUR WATER CONSUMPTION.

Many customers remain unaware of the Eye on Water App. This app is very useful in helping to "keep an eye" on your water usage.



It is a free service that allows you to receive alerts when your consumption rises or spikes more than your average. You can set a high/low tol-

erance and be notified via email or text message when the alert has been issued. It will also notify you if your meter were to trigger a leak indicator.

Please consider signing up at www.eyeonwater.com. It really is a beneficial resource. Please note that, depending on what type of meter you have, available features in the Eye On Water App will be different. For the most robust features, you must have the new meter with cellular end-point technology. The older

version AMR meters will only alert you about a leak if there is a leak indicated on the date your meter is read each month.

We are beginning to change out these old meters, but it will be a long process. Still, the Eye On Water App, even with the older meter, will still provide you with a potential leak alert faster than we can in the Business Office.

Of course, any time we are out checking meters, if we happen to see a leak indication, we will leave a door hanger stating a leak may be present on your service line and to check your plumbing and fixtures.

Scott Salsbery, Utility Superintendent

