

# Troubleshooting a High Use Water Bill FAQ

The first thing to do is conduct an internal audit to discover if any plumbing fixtures are leaking. The most common culprit of excessive water usage is a running toilet, although you should examine all fixtures including outside spigots. Toilet runs can often be difficult to hear or see in the toilet bowl. So, one should open the back tank and look to see if water is running through the discharge flapper or the overflow tube. Additionally, the water meter should be checked for flow through the meter. The meter is typically located in your basement along the wall that is closest to the roadway. They are temperature sensitive and will break when exposed to freezing temperatures, so if you do not have a basement then look in another protected area, like a utility closet. Please take a moment when no one in the household is using water and watch the total. If your meter is recording consumption then water is moving through your home somewhere.

If you did not find evidence of a leak then please reflect back on any recent events or changes in your household. Did the number of residents change? Has there been a significant increase in laundry? Did you power wash your home? Are you an avid gardener? Please review the number of days in the billing cycle on this bill--is it longer than usual? Was there a holiday during that period of time? Did you have a party or overnight guests? Any of these reasons could explain the high consumption. If you can't determine why there was excessive water use, then we also offer water meter audits where we can attach a computer to the meter and review and provide you a report for hourly flow totals through the meter going back up to 30 days. The costs of water audits depend on the size of the water meter, usually between \$75 and \$125 per data audit.

## **The Leaky Toilet:**

Accounting for more than 95% of all water waste, toilet leaks are caused by worn or damaged parts in the toilet flush tank. (Toilet flushes account for about 100 gallons of water use in your home each day—that's about 40% of your total household use!) Some of these leaks will empty directly into the sewer line without leaving any clues. Even so, you can check for these leaks. Common causes of leaky toilets include:

### **Float Arm Problem**

Remove the lid from the top of the flush tank. See if the overflow pipe, plunger ball and flapper are working properly. Do this by flushing the toilet, and watching the tank mechanism and listening. You should hear and see the water flow shut off.

If the water does not shut off, check the water level. If it has risen above the overflow pipe, gently bend the float arm down and flush again. You may need to replace the plunger ball if the water level is about one inch below the top of the overflow pipe and you can still hear water flowing.

### **A Tiny Pinhole**

A pinhole opening below the overflow pipe's water line could produce an invisible leak. Check for this by shining a flashlight down into the overflow pipe. If you see running water, you have a leak that should be re-paired.

### **Defective Plunger Ball (Flapper Valve)**

This is often a silent leak which causes the tank to continually drain and refill. Check for a worn or improperly sealed plunger ball (flapper valve) by dropping a few drops of food coloring into the toilet tank. Do not flush. If a leak exists, the dye-colored water will seep into your toilet bowl in about 5 minutes. If it does, the plunger ball (flapper valve) may need to be replaced or realigned.

## **OTHER PLACES TO CHECK:**

### **Refrigerator Ice Making Unit**

A leak in the ice-making unit will cause excessive ice accumulation in the freezer, and may also produce small puddles of water under the refrigerator. You may want to call your local repair service if you notice either of these things.

### **Dishwasher**

Water accumulated on the floor near the unit could be a sign of a leak. Contact your local repair service to check.

## **OUTDOOR LEAKS:**

### **Water Faucets**

Each outdoor faucet should be checked for leaks. Make sure faucets are fully closed when not in use. If you find a leaky faucet, change the washer (after closing the shut-off valve.)

In colder climates, during the winter these inside shut-off valves should be closed to avoid freezing. Be sure to open the outside faucet AFTER you have shut the inside valve so that any water left in the system will drain. These shut-off valves are usually in your basement. One shut-off valve may control all of your outdoor faucets.

### **Automatic Irrigation Systems**

Soft spots on your lawn could indicate a leak in the irrigation system. Contact a local repair service if you suspect a leak in the system.

### **Swimming Pool**

The pool system's automatic shut-off valve could be malfunctioning, causing a continuous cycle of water to be pumped in and then drained out. If the water level stays higher than normal, or the pool overflows when people are using it, your automatic shut-off valve may need to be serviced.

**Service Connection Line**

If you find any soft, wet spots on your lawn or hear running water outside of your home, you may have a leak in the service line to your house. Water soaks into the ground, causing the soft spots. Close your main shut-off valve. If the sound of running water continues, the outside service line may be leaking. While this would not impact your water bill, you should address this as the leaking could cause damage to your property.

**Bathtubs & Showers**

Check the spout and showerhead for dripping water. You may need new washers on the faucet handles. You may be able to complete this repair by yourself by unscrewing the faucet and replacing the washer with one of the same size (or the correct size if the existing washer is too big.) Close your home's main shut-off valve before completing this repair

**If I found a leak, can I get a billing credit?**

The water commission does sometimes offer credits on excessive consumption depending on the specific circumstance (toilet leak that was fixed, water pipe break in the house, etc. Please notify the water commission in writing of your request.

