

CITY OF TAUNTON  
WATER REGULATION  
WATER AND SEWER BILLING ADJUSTMENTS

Section 1: Billing Adjustments

A. INTRODUCTION

a. The Taunton Water Department may consider utility billing adjustments for only the following four reasons once a bill has been issued:

1. Option 1: Clerical billing or reading error by the Water Department;
2. Option 2: Proven malfunction of the water meter;
3. Option 3: Water leak adjustment in accordance with approved policy; and
4. Option 4: Billing adjustments at final meter readings.

For Option 1: a customer that suspects that there may be a billing error and or that the meter was incorrectly read should contact the Water Department Customer Service Center and report his or her suspicions. An investigation will be undertaken, and if it is determined that an error did occur, a new water bill will be issued for the correct amount.

For Option 2: the customer has the right to request that the customer's meter be tested. However, be advised that older residential water meters generally slow down and under-read actual usage resulting in smaller water bills. Residential water meters are not known to read high. There are multiple articles on-line that discuss this condition of meters reading low, not high. If the water department tests a meter at customer's request and it is determined to be reading outside industry standard parameters we will issue a new bill for the corrected amount due, which amount could be lower or higher than the bill being challenged. If the meter tests within industry standards, the water bill will stand as issued and the customer will be charged the cost of the meter test. If the meter is over reading the customer will get a new lower bill and will not have to pay for the cost of the meter test.

For Option 3; customers may request a billing adjustment for water leaks that result in substantially higher than normal billings under certain conditions. All water that passed through the meter will generally be billed for both water and sewer usage except at lower tiered rates. All conditions of the policy must be met. A sewer bill alone will not be adjusted for outside water usage because the Water Department has a program available for reduction meters that accommodate non sewage generation for outside usages.

For Option 4; this is for the convenience and use of the Water Department Customer Service Center for efficiency purposes during final billings.

B. General Obligations of the Water Customer

A customer that feels that his or her utility bills are in error should first contact the Water Department Customer Service Section at 508-821-1431 to discuss the situation with a customer service representative. The customer service representative will be able to access your water usage history and previous bills and explain the options and processes that must be followed to receive any billings adjustments.

Customer must act in a timely manner. The suspected errors **must be reported** within 45 (forty-five) calendar days from the date of the bill.

For billing relief under Option 3, if customer repairs a leak then customer should notify the Water Department immediately upon completing the repair. Immediate notification will allow for time to possibly adjust the next bill before it's issued. In any event, the notification must be received no later than 45 (forty-five) calendar days following the date of the bill that covered the time period in which the leak was repaired.

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NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS

If you suspect or know that you have a water leak or the water department has notified you that you may have a leak, you should immediately investigate the water system for leakage and repair water leaks located and maintain documentation of the repairs, including receipts for labor, supplies and equipment for submission with your application for a billing adjustment. If you have a plumber make the repair then you should have the plumber complete a plumber's certification form.

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The Water Department's Water Supervisor and the Commissioner of the Department of Public Works are authorized to approve adjustments to bills.

Any dispute of a meter reading does not waive the responsibility to pay the utility bill by its due date or face the possibility of additional late fees added to the bill.

The Customer must complete the Request for Billing Review form and submit it to the Water Department Customer Service Section. Water Department customer service agents will assist in filling out the form upon request.

C. Option 1 requesting a bill adjustment due to billing or reading error by the Water Department

- a. It is recommended but not required that the customer first contact the Water Department Customer Service Section to discuss the reasons why the customer believe an error occurred.
- b. Submit to the Water Department Customer Service Section within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of the bill a completed **Request for Billing Review**. This form is available at the water department or on the City's website.
- c. The Water Department Customer Service Section will advise the customer in writing of its findings. If you were overbilled you will receive a new corrected bill.

- d. A credit for any overpayment will be applied to your utility account should an adjustment be given.
- e. A dispute of a utility bill does not waive the customer's responsibility to pay the utility bill by its due date.

D. Option 2 requesting water meter testing

- a. It is recommended but not required that customers first contact the Water Department Customer Service Section to discuss the reasons why they believe the meter is recording inaccurately.
- b. Customer to submit to the Water Department Customer Service Section within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of the bill a completed **Request for Billing Review**. This form is available at the water department or on the City's website.
- c. Customer has the right to request that the meter be tested if customer questions the accuracy of the water meter reading.
- d. The Water department will have the meter tested by an independent water meter testing company selected by the Water Department.
- e. If the meter reading is determined to be reading accurate (within standards of the American Water Works Association), the cost of the testing fee will be charged to the customer's account.
- f. The Water Department Customer Service Section will advise the customer in writing of its findings.
- g. If the meter is determined to be over reading and the customer was overbilled, a new corrected bill will be issued. The volume of water being billed will be adjusted by the percentage that the meter reads high.
- h. If the meter is determined to be under reading the customer will receive a new higher corrected bill. The volume of water being billed will be adjusted by the percentage that the meter reads low.
- i. A dispute of a utility bill does not waive a customer's responsibility to pay the utility bill by its due date.

E. Option 3 Water leak adjustment

- a. It is recommended but not required that customers first contact the Water Department Customer Service Section to discuss the reasons why they believe the meter is recording inaccurately.
- b. Customer to submit to the Water Department Customer Service Section within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of the bill a completed **Request for Billing Review**. This form is available at the water department or on the City's website.
- c. No billing relief outside of the reduction meter program will be granted for sewer service due to outdoor uses of water, e.g. irrigation, filling swimming pools, etc. (The city has a program available to customers to allow for reduction meters to

measure outside water use for credit adjustments to sewer billings).

- d. A water leak may span more than one billing cycle before it is detected and repaired. Billing adjustments will be determined for the full length of time that the leak persisted.
- e. The Water Department retains the right to deny any claim for adjustment that is not caused by the fault of the Department.
- f. Customers who have denied the Water Department staff from entering their premises to inspect the water meter are not eligible for option 3 billing adjustment.
- g. Customers who have tampered with the water meter or meter reading system as determined by the Water Department are not eligible for option 3 billing adjustment.
- h. Adjustments of utility bills will not be made for premises not occupied or abandoned at the time of the leak where reasonable care for the plumbing system has not been provided. The burden of proof demonstrating reasonable care was provided is the responsibility of the customer.
- i. To be eligible for an option 3 billing adjustment, the metered water usage must be at least double the average usage over the preceding four (for quarterly billing) or twelve (for monthly billing) periods.
- j. For customers with a limited billing record not meeting the preceding item h. historical time record a calculation will be based upon normal anticipated usage for similarly occupied properties and the billing record that does exist for the customer.
- k. Only one water leak adjustment per customer per address is allowed every 5 (five) calendar years. The first year is the calendar year in which the first adjustment occurred and the last year being the end of the fourth calendar year following the initial year.
- l. The five year waiting period may be waived provided extenuating circumstances occurred and the Water Department in consultation with the Commissioner of the Department of Public Works and others that it may consult are in agreement.
- m. After July 1, 2020, for owner occupied and non-owner occupied apartment building, water leak adjustments will only be considered where the owner has implemented a water leak detection program acceptable to the Water Department.
- n. After July 1, 2020, for commercial and industrial buildings, water leak adjustments will only be considered where the owner or occupant has implemented a water leak detection program acceptable to the Water

Department.

- o. There must be reasonable evidence that a water leak occurred or other reasonable documented incident that is acceptable to the Water Department.
  - p. For single family residences and owner occupied apartments, evidence of a leak being repaired includes receipts for materials and labor. If a plumber repairs the leak a Plumbers Repair Statement should be obtained.
  - q. For non-owner occupied apartments and commercial and industrial properties, evidence of a leak being repaired requires a completed Plumbers Repair Statement.
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- r. Adjustments if approved will be made by calculating a new bill.
- s. The adjustment bill will to be calculated by determining the current bill(s) being reviewed less the new billing being the greater of items (a.) or (b.) following :
  - a. the cost of the water delivered equaling the billing service charges plus the volume of water delivered at the Tier 1 rate.
  - b. An amount equal to 125% of largest bill for the previous two year period.

**F. Option 4 Billing adjustments at final meter readings.**

- a. The Water Department is allowed to write off minor charges due at final metering reading when it is determined that it is both cost effective and in the benefit of the Water Department to do so.