

WATER BILLING ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM

Date Issued: February 13, 2018

Mandated by: City Council

Current Revision: February 13, 2018

Cross Reference:

- Water Billing Adjustment Program
Procedure FIN-026-C

Next Review: February 13, 2020

Responsibility: Chief Financial Officer

PURPOSE

To help reduce financial hardship for residents through an adjustment to their City water and sewer utility charges when high water consumption due to a water leak occurs as well as circumstances where cause of consumption is not known and considered Unexplained or Unintentional.

POLICY

Residential Account holders who qualify will receive an adjustment of 50% of their Excess Charges for consumption of water and sewage on their City utility bill when their water and sewer consumption is three times or more of their Seasonal Average.

DEFINITIONS

Account Holder – shall mean the person who is named on the City utility account.

Adjustment – shall mean a credit on a qualified Residential Account.

Chief Financial Officer – shall mean the person who is appointed to the position by the City Manager.

City – shall mean the City of Fort Saskatchewan.

Council – shall mean the municipal Council of the City of Fort Saskatchewan.

Dwelling – shall mean a self-contained residence with sleeping, cooking, and sanitary facilities, intended for permanent habitation.

Excess Charge – shall mean the variable charges at the rates in effect at the time of billing for that consumption which is over and above the Seasonal Average based on the current account history.

Fixed Fees – shall mean the set monthly fees for water, sewage, and waste as per the Fees and Charges Bylaw, which do not vary based on consumption of water.

Leak – shall mean a loss of water through a crack, hole, or break in a pipe, faucet, or fixture or water loss through a faulty faucet, fixture, or appliance at a Residential Dwelling.

Investigation – shall mean an inspection by a member of City staff to check in and around a dwelling for leaks or other reason for high consumption. The investigation shall include reading the water meter and may, at the City's discretion, include a water meter bench test. All account and property history may be reviewed as well.

Occupied Dwelling – shall mean a property that is inhabited.

Residential Account – shall mean an active City utility account for a single Dwelling that has a designated Water Meter to measure consumption specifically within that Dwelling.

Seasonal Average – shall mean the historical average consumption for the month prior, the month of, and the month following the utility bill in question for the previous two year period.

Unexplained Water Loss – shall mean a jump in consumption where there is no immediately visible or apparent Leak or reason for water loss.

Unintentional Water Loss – shall mean a jump in consumption caused by accidental and unexpected consumption of water under circumstances where no water use was intended. Circumstances where water is intentionally used, such as irrigation or filling a pool, pond, or camper, shall not be considered unintentional water loss, regardless of any unexpected jump in consumption.

Water Meter – shall mean technology used by the City to measure the amount of water that goes into the dwelling for billing purposes.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. An Account Holder is responsible for initiating the application process for an adjustment. An application must be submitted on or before the due date of the utility bill in question. The application will include acknowledgement that the applicant did not knowingly utilize water resulting in excess charges.
2. An adjustment will only be considered once every three years per residential account.
3. An adjustment may be issued for up to two consecutive utility bills based on when the leak was rectified. Proof of repair will form part of the application process.
4. Qualified accounts will be issued an adjustment in the amount of 50% of the Excess Charges for consumption of both water and sewage. The Account Holder remains responsible for all Fixed Fees for water, sewage, and waste as well as charges for the Seasonal Average plus 50% of the Excess Charge.
5. Residential Accounts for Account Holder Occupied Dwellings may qualify for an adjustment.
6. Residential Account Holder Applications that do not meet the program principles will be reviewed on an individual basis. These applications may require an Investigation. This will include circumstances where the cause of consumption is not known and is considered Unexplained or Unintentional.
7. City Manager is responsible for any appeals that may occur under the Water Billing Adjustment Program.

AUTHORITY / RESPONSIBILITY TO IMPLEMENT

The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for administrative compliance with the Council Policy and Administrative Procedure.

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- Water Billing Adjustment Program Policy FIN-026-C
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PURPOSE

To give direction to Administration for the management of applications to the Water Billing Adjustment Program. This Procedure will outline the roles and responsibilities of the Finance Department in the approval or decline of each type of application.

DEFINITIONS

Account Holder – means the person who is named on the City utility account.

Adjustment – means a credit on a qualified Residential Account.

Administration – means City employees.

Chief Financial Officer – means the person who is appointed to the position by the City Manager as per the *Municipal Government Act*.

City – means the City of Fort Saskatchewan.

Council – means the municipal Council of the City of Fort Saskatchewan.

Dwelling – means a self-contained residence with sleeping, cooking, and sanitary facilities, intended for permanent habitation.

Excess Charge – means the variable charges at the rates in effect at the time of billing for that consumption which is over and above the Seasonal Average based on the current account history.

Fixed Fees – means the set monthly fees for water, sewage, and waste as per the fees and charges bylaw, which do not vary based on consumption of water. These fees are set out in the Fees and Charges Bylaw.

Leak – means a loss of water through a crack, hole, or break in a pipe, faucet, or fixture or water loss through a faulty faucet, fixture, or appliance at a Residential Dwelling.

Investigation – means an inspection by City staff to check in and around a dwelling for leaks or other reason for high consumption. The investigation shall include reading the water meter and may, at the City's discretion, include a water meter bench test. All account and property history may be reviewed as well.

Occupied Dwelling – means a property that is inhabited.

Proof of Repair – means documentation that supports the repair of a leaking fixture such as an itemized receipt showing labor, parts or other items supporting the repair.

Residential Account – means an active City utility account for a single Dwelling that has a designated water meter to measure consumption specifically within that Dwelling.

Seasonal Average – means the historical average consumption for the month prior, the month of, and the month following the utility bill in question for the previous 2 year period.

Unexplained Water Loss – means a jump in consumption where there is no immediately visible or apparent Leak or reason for water loss.

Unintentional Water Loss – means a jump in consumption caused by accidental and unexpected consumption of water under circumstances where no water use was intended. Circumstances where water is intentionally used, such as irrigation or filling a pool, pond, or camper, shall not be considered unintentional water loss, regardless of any unexpected jump in consumption.

Unoccupied Dwelling – means a property left uninhabited overnight for a period of 14 days or more, regardless of any periodic checks on the property.

Water Meter – means technology used by the City to measure the amount of water that goes into the Dwelling for billing purposes.

PROCEDURE

Water Billing Adjustment Application Received:

1. Residential Accounts for account holder Occupied Dwellings will qualify for an Adjustment if:
 - a. the account is active and in good standing with the City;
 - b. the account has a minimum 2 year consumption history;
 - c. the utility bill in question includes water consumption that is at least 3 times the seasonal average based on the current account history; and
 - d. proof of repair is attached to application (Appendix "A")
2. Applications from Residential Account holders shall be reviewed on an individual basis if:
 - a. the account does not have the minimum history requirements;
 - b. the account is for a rental property or Dwelling not Occupied by the Account Holder; or
 - c. the application is due to unexplained or Unintentional Water Loss
3. Review of any application may include Investigation of the property. All account and property history, as well as the average consumption history for similar properties, may be considered as part of the review to determine both Seasonal Average and qualification.
4. Utility Clerk Receives application and reviews information to ensure all components of application are attached and filled in correctly.

5. Application must be submitted by the Account Holder prior to the due date of the utility bill in question. The applicant must provide receipts for repairing the cause of the high consumption or check mark the declaration that the cause was unintentional and has been corrected or is unexplained.
6. Utility Clerk will figure out the Seasonal Average on account. (Due to the transition from bi-monthly billing to monthly, the average for 1 month will be half of the consumption for a bi-monthly bill being used in the Seasonal Average calculation.) Where the minimum account history is not available, the Utility Clerk may consider other history on the property or similar properties.
7. Utility Clerk will determine the amount payable for Fixed Fees and Seasonal Average for the account.
8. Utility Clerk will send a letter to the customer stating the amount payable. A copy of the letter will be attached to the customer account.
9. Utility Clerk will offer payment arrangements prior to further review of the application.
10. No penalties will be applied during the application review.
11. Utility Clerk will enter notes on the customer account that an application has been received and record information on a Water Billing Adjustment Folder or the Unexplained Water Loss Adjustment Folder, whichever applies. The application will be scanned and saved in these folders as well.
12. Utility Clerk will ensure that:
 - a. the consumption is 3 times the Seasonal Average; and
 - b. the account submitting an application has not received a Water Billing Adjustment credit within the past 3 years.
13. Completed application will be submitted to the Finance Customer Service Coordinator for review and decision of application.

Review and Investigation:

- 1) Finance Customer Service Coordinator will either approve or decline Water Billing Adjustment application or begin investigation for unexplained water loss.
- 2) If inspection of the property is necessary, the inspection will be conducted by a properly trained member of the utility staff, and checks may include:
 - a. reading the water meter to verify the consumption recording, checking the flow indicator, and downloading data if available;
 - b. shutting off water supply to the dwelling to determine if there is any pressure loss;
 - c. providing dye tabs and checking toilets; and
 - d. checking fixtures, appliances, and the yard and exterior of the dwelling.
 - e. Review of all account history.
- 3) If an Investigation determines a reason for an Unexplained Water Loss, the Account Holder is responsible to rectify the issue and provide proof of repair or other corrective action taken.

- 4) If an Investigation determines that a pool had been filled or that high water consumption could have resulted from another intended use of water, the Account Holder is responsible to provide proof of purchase of the water from another source or during another billing period. If such proof cannot be provided, the City may estimate the volume of water used through intended activity and add this volume to the Seasonal Average.
- 5) At the discretion of the City, as part of an investigation relating to a billing adjustment application, the Water Meter may be sent for a bench test at no cost to the account holder.
- 6) Applications will not be accepted for Unoccupied Dwellings, non-residential properties, or properties under construction.

Decision:

1. Once a decision on the application has been made, the Utility Clerk will notify the client with the outcome. If approved, the credit will be applied to the account and a letter sent out to the Account Holder explaining the approval and the amount being credited to the account. If declined, a letter will be sent explaining the decline. A copy of the letter will be attached to the customer account and all related notes will be updated.
2. The Account Holder is responsible for making payment arrangements, subject to the City's approval, of any amount remaining on the account after the Adjustment is applied.
3. Penalties will be applied if payment is not made within 10 business days of the date on the letter giving the approval or decline of the application.

WATER BILLING ADJUSTMENT REQUEST FORM

Date: ____/____/____ (Month/Day/Year) Account Number: _____

Bill Date for consideration: _____

Name (as it appears on the water bill): _____

Service Address: _____

Water Billing Adjustment Parameters

- Completion of this form does not guarantee that a Water Billing Adjustment Credit will be issued.
- One Water Billing adjustment every (3) years for Residential Customers due to a leak past the water meter that has caused their water consumption to increase by a minimum of 3 times their seasonal average.
- The Water Billing adjustment request must be submitted before the due date of the water bill in which the leak occurred.
- Customer must submit completed form along with all of the receipts associated with the repair to: utilityclerk@fortsask.ca or in person to City Hall 10005-102 St, Fort Saskatchewan T8L 2C5
- If you need help filling out this form call the City's utility department at 780-992-6228.

Water Billing Adjustment Methodology

The consumption portion of the water bill will be adjusted by charging the normal consumption seasonal average plus 50% of the overage. For example if your seasonal average is 30 cubic meters (m³) and your bill charged you 100m³, you would be charged 30m³+ 35m³. Fixed Fees will apply and will not be adjusted.

Date Leak was repaired: ____/____/____ Leak Repaired By: _____

Location and type of Leak: _____

Name (of homeowner): _____ Contact #: (____) ____ - _____

E-mail: _____

Note: Adjustment will not be considered nor processed without proof of repair.
If you do not meet all program principles please fill out the reason in the box below.

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I acknowledge that the high consumption on bill being considered for adjustment was unintentional or unexplained. I did not knowingly utilize this water for personal use.

Signature: _____