

Automated Meter Reading

How the Project Affects You

How are you setting this up?

We will be contacting all of our customers to make an appointment, primarily by letter but also by phone. If we do not hear back from a customer we will knock on the door when we are working in the area and also leave a note to call us.

This project will take approximately three years to complete, so we will continue to read some meters manually in the interim.

Will I have to be home for you to do this work?

For safety and security reasons, we will need the owner of the property or a responsible adult to be present. If you are usually unavailable during our work hours we can schedule the work when it is convenient for you.

We would also like to point out that our workers wear uniforms with our logo and their first name, and also carry District identification tags. If you ever have a question about who is at your property and why, please do not hesitate to call.

Is there a cost to me for this work?

There is no direct charge to you for us to install the meter or AMR system. Nothing is free, so ultimately the cost is included in our overall operating costs which in turn are paid by our customers through our regular water rates. A project like this requires a significant capital investment, and we have planned for it in our annual budgets. Therefore it will not have any impact on our rates in the near term. Over the long term, this project will reduce our meter reading costs and help us keep our rates reasonable.

Why are you replacing the meter?

Our current meters are mechanical devices and tend to lose accuracy over time. It is important that each meter is accurate. Every customer has a right to expect that their meter and the meters of other customers are accurate.

The Maine Public Utilities Commission requires that meters meet accuracy requirements. PUC also requires water utilities to test meters on a regular schedule or replace them. In the past, we had an ongoing meter replacement program in which meters were removed, tested, refurbished, and reused. This is labor-intensive and costly.

In addition, the bodies of our current meters are made of brass which contains small amounts of lead. Recent regulations from the US Environmental Protection Agency require us to use lead-free materials when we replace a meter.

The new meters have several advantages over the current ones. They are electronic and operate on a battery with an expected life of 20 years. The meter measures flow through a magnetic field and because it has no moving parts, it is expected to be accurate throughout its service life. The meter is made of a composite material and does not contain any lead.

The cost of the new meters is comparable to the old style, but we expect to save money by greatly reducing the number of meters that need to be replaced each year.

Is my bill going up?

As mentioned before, your bill will not go up because of this project. Nevertheless, some of our customers will see higher consumption and consequently higher bills. The mechanical meters currently in use, “slow down” over time due to simple wear. The more water that goes through it the less accurate it becomes. (By the way, mechanical meters never “speed up” as they wear.)

The new electronic meters are far more accurate than the mechanical meters currently in use even when new. So if your meter is inaccurate, you may see an increase in your bill. You may not be using any more water than before, but the new meter will be recording water use more accurately. The amount of higher consumption you may see will give you an indication of how inaccurate the old meter was.

The new meters will not slow down or speed up, and will retain their accuracy over their 20-year service life.

What’s in it for me?

The data we receive from the water meter will be analyzed by our software system to send alerts to our staff if a problem occurs. We can configure the specific settings for alerts, and in general will include:

- Low continuous flow (for example a slowly leaking toilet)
- High continuous flow (a plumbing leak or a hose left running)
- Reverse flow (flow of water in the building back into the public water supply)

Our staff will receive an email or text message when an alert is received. We will then be able to notify you. This should help minimize wasted water and prevent an unusually high bill. This will be much more efficient than the way we do it now. We read your meter once every three months and prepare the bill. Our billing clerk looks over the bills to see if there are any that appear higher than normal. We try to call and send a “leak letter” to advise you of the situation. By that time a lot of wasted water may have gone through the meter.

Occasionally someone’s plumbing or meter freezes and bursts while they are away. An alert in the case may help minimize the property damage that can result.

Can I access my water use information?

You probably were not really going to ask this question, but we want to tell you about another feature of this system.

Once we complete our work you will be given access to your consumption data through a secure web-based application. You will be able to see your hourly, daily, monthly, and yearly water consumption, and you can use this information to help manage your water use. It may also help you answer questions about your bill. For example, you should be able to see when you started watering the lawn or when you filled the kid's pool, and how much water was used.