



## Public Services Department Policy or Procedure

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**Procedure Number:** WS-001-04

**Policy/Procedure:** Adjustments to Water and Sewer Bills

**Effective/Revision Date:** May 6th, 2008 (Revision #4)

**Scope:** This procedure outlines the City of Starkville's policy for adjusting water/sewer bills.

**Exclusions:**

- Rural water associations and utilities to which bulk water is sold.
- Indoor leaks in multifamily residential establishments where two or more residential units are supplied through a single water meter.

### **1.000 Responsibilities**

- 1.100 The Superintendent of Water and Sewer Operations shall be responsible for verifications, with the exception of meter readings, as needed.
- 1.200 The billing department Collection Manager shall be responsible for initiating meter reading verifications, adjustments to accounts and applicable recordkeeping.

### **2.000 Adjustment Protocol**

#### **2.100 Determination of Cause**

When an adjustment to a high water and sewer bill is requested by the customer, the customer will first be asked if the high bill is due to a leak that has been repaired.

2.110 If the answer is no, the meter will be re-read. If the bill is due to a meter reading error, the customer will be notified of the amount due on the current bill along with the amount of the adjustment on the next bill (if any). If the meter reading is correct, the customer will be notified that they are responsible for the full amount of the current bill.

2.120 If the answer is yes, then the customer will be e-mailed a *Water Leak Repair Verification* form (appendix) or instructed to pick

one up at the Water and Sewer Operations Department office. The completed form will be returned to the Superintendent of Water and Sewer Operations.

2.130 If the answer is a swimming pool fill, refer to section 2.400 of this policy.

2.140 If the answer is a fire suppression system discharge, refer to section 2.500 of this policy.

## 2.200 Challenges to Meter Accuracy

Should the customer desire to challenge meter accuracy, the following protocol will be followed.

2.210 If the meter has been repaired or replaced within sixty (60) days prior to the commencement of high water usage,

2.211 The meter will be tested by the City at no cost to the customer.

2.212 Meters installed as replacements for stopped meters or replacements of turbo meters with compound meters will not be tested at City expense. Exceptions are at the discretion of the Water and Sewer Operations Superintendent when subsequent consumption appears abnormal for the size of the service line and the type of dwelling at the service address.

2.213 If the meter test indicates that the meter is overstating the water usage outside of industry-accepted tolerances, the amount of overcharged consumption will be calculated from the test report results and credited to the customer's account.

2.214 If the meter is determined to be accurate within industry-accepted tolerances, the customer will be notified that they are responsible for the full amount of the bill.

2.220 If the meter does not meet criteria outlined in section 2.210 and the customer desires a test of meter accuracy, the following terms will be offered:

2.221 If the test indicates that the meter is accurate within industry-accepted tolerances, the customer will have a meter testing fee of \$80 plus the meter cost added to

their next bill. The customer is responsible for the full bill amount.

- 2.222 If the meter test indicates that the meter is overstating the water usage outside of industry-accepted tolerances, the amount of overcharged consumption will be calculated from the test report results and credited to the customer's account. The City will absorb the test cost.

## 2.300 Adjustments for Leaks

- 2.310 In no situation will a water or sewer bill be adjusted without presenting verifiable proof that a leak has been repaired during the period of high water consumption. If the highest month of consumption does not exceed the average of the prior six (6) leak-free months by a minimum of fifty percent (50%), an adjustment will not be considered.
- 2.320 The *Water Leak Repair Verification* form (appendix) will be reviewed by the Superintendent of Water and Sewer Operations. Unsigned or incomplete forms without required documentation will not be accepted. Only the signatures of property owners or rental property managers will be accepted.
- 2.330 When evidence of the leak as stated has been verified, the following adjustments are allowed:
- 2.331 For **indoor leaks**, the amount of consumption for two (2) consecutive high bills in excess of the six (6) month average consumption prior to the leak will be calculated. This amount will be divided in half and the resulting amount of consumption will be credited to the customer's account for both water and sewer. The customer is responsible for the balance.
- 2.332 **Outdoor leak** adjustments are similar to those of an indoor leak with the exception of the sewer. The sewer bill will be adjusted down further to the six (6) month historical average consumption.
- 2.333 The limit to the number of leak adjustments is one per account per year (12 months).

2.334 In the event that a customer has not established a six (6) month usage history, a minimum of three (3) months may be used. If a customer has had service less than three months prior to the leak, the current bill will be paid and a credit will be issued to the customer's account when a three (3) month leak-free usage history has been established.

#### 2.400 Adjustment for Swimming Pool Fills

2.410 An adjustment is allowable for sewer only.

2.420 One adjustment for one bill per calendar year will be allowed (January 1 – December 31).

2.430 The sewer consumption will be adjusted to the prior six (6) month historical average.

#### 2.500 Fire Suppression System Discharge

Should a situation exist where potable water is metered on the same service line that supplies the fire suppression system in a dwelling,

2.510 The customer will not be charged for incremental consumption due to a fire.

2.520 The Chief of the Fire Department will provide verification to the billing department Collection Manager.

2.530 The water and sewer bill will be adjusted down to the prior six (6) month historical average consumption.

### **3.000 Enactment**

This policy is enacted immediately upon approval of the Board of Aldermen as reflected in the meeting minutes dated September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005. This policy is not retroactive. Board-approved high consumption bills held in suspension on the date of enactment and awaiting the development and adoption of this policy shall be settled according to the calculations herein with proof of a leak requirement waived.

### **4.000 Revisions**

Revisions to this policy shall only be enacted when approved by the Board of Aldermen and reflected in the applicable meeting minutes.

#### 4.100 Revision History

<u>Date</u>	<u>Rev. #</u>	<u>Nature of Revision</u>
9/6/05	00	Original document.
9/20/05	01	Revised scope to exclude rural water associations and utilities to which bulk water is sold. Removed section 2.540 in its entirety to exclude water associations and utilities from seeking adjustments for fire suppression system forgiveness. Both revisions requested by the City Attorney.
9/20/05	02	Revised section 3.000 to waive the proof of leak requirement for board-approved accounts held in suspension awaiting the development of this policy. This revision requested by the Board of Aldermen and approved on this date.
10/4/05	03	Revised to exclude indoor leaks in commercial, industrial and multifamily residential establishments where two or more units are supplied through a single water meter. This revision requested by the Chief Executive Officer and approved by the Board of Aldermen on this date.
5/6/08	04	Removed the exclusion of indoor leaks in commercial dwellings. Revised section 2.333 to reflect that the maximum number of adjustments per year will be one per account instead of one per customer.