

Potential Causes of High Water Bills

Changes in your water use

Did you have house guests, water your lawn more than usual, or do anything else out of the ordinary in the last month that uses a lot of water? If so, this may account for an increase in your water bill.

Check for leaks

Leaks, whether unseen or unfixed, can waste hundreds and even thousands of gallons of water. It is important to routinely check your plumbing and home for leaky faucets, toilets, and outside taps and irrigation lines.

Toilet and faucet leaks

The most common cause for a high water bill is running water from your toilet. A continuously running toilet can waste up to 200 gallons a day. That can double a family's typical water use, so fix toilet leaks as soon as possible. Some leaks are easy to find, such as a dripping faucet or running toilet. You can usually hear a running toilet, but not always. See the toilet assessment below for help in determining if this is the cause of your high water bill.

Outdoor and underground leaks

Leaks can also occur in harder to find places, such as under your house or in the service line between your water meter and your home. Check outdoor spigots and crawl spaces, and look for wet spots in your yard, which may indicate a leak.

Do-it-yourself Toilet Assessment

First check for the most common leak: a deteriorated or defected flush valve (flapper) ball at the bottom of the toilet tank. If it does not make a tight seal water will leak into the toilet bowl.

To check for this:

- Take the lid off of the tank behind the bowl, flush the toilet, then wait for it to fully refill
- Put a few drops of dye or a colored dye tablet (available at some hardware stores) in the tank
- Wait at least 20 minutes; longer if you suspect it is a small leak.
- If there is any color in the toilet bowl, there is a leak.

Still unsure of how to check for a toilet leak, Click here for to view a how-to video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHxgCVWuAjs>


The second most common type of leak has to do with an improperly adjusted or broken fill (ballcock) valve. To check for this take the lid off of the toilet tank, flush, and see if water is draining into the overflow tubes when the tank is full.

Water Softeners

Customers with water softeners have higher water bills due to the regeneration or backwash cycles their systems go through. The systems are preset to regenerate or

backwash on a regular basis. The systems will use water to clean the filter media and discharge the wastewater into the ground next to the system. There are times when these systems will get stuck in a cycle which will cause higher water use.

The following table shows the amount of water that can be lost (and billed to your account) for various size leaks.

Leak Size		Gallons Per Day	Gallons Per Month	Cubic Feet per Quarter
	A dripping leak consumes:	15 gallons	450 gallons	180 Cubic Feet
.	A 1/32 in. leak consumes:	264 gallons	7,920 gallons	3,168 Cubic feet
.	A 1/16 in. leak consumes:	943 gallons	28,300 gallons	11,319 Cubic Feet
●	A 1/8 in. leak consumes:	3,806 gallons	114,200 gallons	45,681 Cubic Feet
●	A 1/4 in. leak consumes:	15,226 gallons	456,800 gallons	182,721 Cubic feet
●	A 1/2 in. leak consumes:	60,900 gallons	1,827,000 gallons	730,800 Cubic Feet

Irrigation Systems

During the summer irrigation systems are a common source of high water use. Watering times generally double during the summer months compared to the winter. Automated irrigation systems should be checked regularly to be sure they are functioning properly and have no leaks or broken sprinkler heads. If a sprinkler valve sticks on, it could waste an extremely large quantity of water. The irrigation timer may not be programmed properly; i.e., sprinklers are watering too often and/or for too long. Reprogramming may be necessary if the power has been off.

When All Else Fails...

Courtesy of the County of Lake, California Website: Excessive Water Use Mystery "Solved" (and a good sense of humor)

Jennifer and Jim kept getting HUGE water bills. They knew beyond a doubt that the bills weren't representative of their actual usage, and no matter how they tried to conserve, the high bills continued.

Although they could see nothing wrong, they had everything checked for leaks or problems: first the water meter, then outdoor pipes, indoor pipes, underground pipes, faucets, toilets, washer, ice maker, etc. -- all to no avail. The HUGE water bills continued.

One day recently, Jim was home sick and kept hearing water running downstairs. He got up from his sick bed to investigate, and stumbled onto the cause of such high

water bills. Apparently, what he discovered was happening all day long when they were not at home. Knowing that few would believe him, he taped this clip of “the problem”.

To view the video, go to:

<http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Assets/SpecialDistricts/Images/CatFlushingVideo.wmv>

What Can I Do if My Bill is Unusually High?

If you receive a bill that you feel is too high, check over the common causes listed above. This may help to pinpoint the source of the high bill. Most often, the Town’s utility billing program will detect unusually high bills, and the Town will automatically send our utility staff out to check the meter and the property for a potential leak. After you have checked over your house, if you still feel that your bill is too high, please call 703-435-6814. Town staff will schedule a leak check with you to check for a ground leak. If no leak is detected, you may need to contact a plumber or other professional to help determine the source of a leak. Property owners or lessee shall be responsible for all areas of waterworks outside of the responsibility of the town.