

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

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Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

I need water turned on at my rental property, a house that I'm renting, or new home:

If the customer has never had utility services in their name in the Town of Blacksburg before, there is a \$40.00 deposit and a \$10.00 transfer fee required at the time they sign up for services. If the \$50.00 can be paid over the phone with a Visa or MasterCard, everything can be taken care of over the phone. If the customer cannot pay over the phone, they would need to come by the office to make the payment with check or cash and to complete the sign-up process.

If the customer has had services previously, and had a good credit record with us, there is just a \$10.00 transfer fee required which will be on their first bill.

What happens to my deposit?

At the end of a year of good service, the \$40.00 deposit will be returned to the customer. If the customer terminates services before a year of good services has passed, the deposit will be applied to their final bill. If there is a credit on the account, a refund check will be mailed for the credit balance.

What is the transfer fee for?

The \$10.00 transfer fee is non-refundable, and is more of a service fee. It covers the technicians going out to get an initial read, and to turn the water on in the event that it's off and it covers the technicians going out to turn the water off and get a final read when the customer terminates services. It also covers the technicians going out to re-check the meter in the event that the customer has a high water bill.

Do I need to be there when they turn the water on?

Customers are not required to be present to have water turned on. In the event that something was left running when the water was turned off, a notice will be left on the door letting the customer know that they need to call the office to set up a time to meet the technician at the property before we can leave the water on.

How will I get my bill?

Statements can be mailed to the customer's service address, or another address they would prefer. We can send copies of bills to other addresses upon request. Customers also have the option to use e-notifications as well. The first bill will always come as a paper statement. If the customer opted to have e-notifications instead, the first statement will come as both an e-note and paper copy. On the paper copy of the bill is a PIN that customers can use to sign up for online services if they would like.

Do I have to give you my social security number?

No, we mainly use this for security purposes.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

Why do you need my permanent mailing address?

We only use this in regards to final bills. If a customer fails to call us and terminate services, but another customer signs up for services, we will mail the final bill and any deposit refunds that they may be entitled to, to their permanent mailing address. If mail is returned, we also send it to the customer's permanent address to try and ensure that they receive all information regarding their account.

Why do you need my email address if I don't want e-notes?

We do not send junk mail, and we do not give out email addresses to any outside sources. In the event that there is an emergency, like a huge leak has occurred at the property and we needed to turn the water off, and we are unable to contact the customer via phone, we would send them an email. We would also send an email if there were issues with the customer's account, or payments.

I don't want to use the trash service; do I have to pay for it?

Town ordinance does require that all customers that can be on Town trash to pay for the service. If the customer is going out of Town for more than 3 months and the property will be vacant, we can suspend the trash service for them but we can only do this for up to 6 months. At the end of the 6 month suspension if the house is still vacant we can further suspend the trash service, however, customers will need to call to continue the suspension, this is not automatic.

How am I billed? Is it estimated or actual consumption?

The Town's meter technicians come out and read the meters through electronic devices each month. Through the use of the previous month's read, and the current read, the customer's usage is calculated and billed to them. Customers are billed for their actual consumption, it is not estimated. The water usage is measured by the hundreds of gallons. Customers are not charged for anything less than 100 gallons of water.

How often will I be billed?

Customers are billed each month.

Can I change the due date of my bill?

The Town has 2 cycles that most all residential properties fall into. The due date is either the 1st or the 15th of every month for these properties. Because of the way the cycles fall, and the reading schedules of our meters, a customer's due date cannot be changed.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

What are my options for paying my bills?

There are several options for making payments:

- Payments can be made by sending a check through the mail. Our mailing address is:
Department of Financial Services
P.O. Box 90003
Blacksburg, VA 24062
- Payments can be taken over the phone at (540) 961-1119; there is no additional charge for this service. The only methods of payment accepted over the phone are Visa or MasterCard.
- Payments are accepted in person in the Municipal building on the second floor at the cashier's window. The building is located at 300 South Main Street in Blacksburg. Cash, checks, Visa or MasterCard, and the Hokie Passport are accepted. If the payment is made after hours and the building is closed, there is a drop box on the Washington Street side of the building.
- Payments can also be made online. Customers have to receive their first bill in the mail before signing up for online services. There will be a PIN number on the bill and that will allow them to access the account online and make payments.

What are my options as far as auto-pay is concerned?

Customers can sign up for auto-pay using their online utility account. They will need to wait until they receive their first bill in the mail in order to sign up for an online account. There will be a PIN number on the first bill that they will need in order to complete this process. If the customer chooses to sign up for auto-pay online, they can use a Visa, Discover or MasterCard; they can also use e-checks.

Customers can also sign up for bank draft here in the office. They do not need to wait until they receive their first bill to sign up for bank draft services. We just need a copy of a voided check, or a statement from their bank that includes their account and routing information.

What if I need to change my card information on file for auto-pay services?

If a customer needs to change their card information on file, they will need to do so online. We do not store the card information in the office, nor do we have direct access to it, for security purposes. In order to change the card information, the customer needs to log on to our website: www.blacksburg.gov. They will need to choose the option of "I Want To..." from the row of headings on the homepage, and then choose "Pay." They will then need to choose "Utility Billing" from the list of options. On the next screen, the customer will be prompted to enter their User ID and PIN. Once they have accessed their account, they will need to choose "Auto Pay" from the options on the left hand side of the page in the upper corner. At the next screen, they should choose "Modify Enrollment" and this will allow them to change their credit card information used for auto-pay services.

What is the Town's policy on returned checks or checks with insufficient funds?

A \$35.00 returned check fee is added to all checks that are returned from the bank.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

How do I sign up for services online?

In order to sign up for services online, customers must wait until they receive their first bill in the mail. The PIN will be located about halfway down the page, on page 1 of the bill. There will be a heading that says "Click2Gov Internet PIN#" and directly across from it is a 10 digit number that starts with 4 zeros. With the combination of the PIN and the customer's account number they should be able to sign up for services online. The PIN will be on every bill until it has been changed in our system. The PIN will not be on a delinquent notice.

In order to create an online account, the customer must go to www.blacksburg.gov. There will be a heading across the top that says "I Want To..." and the customer will need to select "Pay" from the drop down menu. On the next page, options will be presented and the customer will need to choose "Utility Billing." The customer will then be prompted to enter their User ID, which is always their account number including the dash, and the PIN that is located on the bill. Once they have entered this information for the first time, they will then need to enter a valid email address, and to create a new PIN. Once this process has been completed, a confirmation email will be sent to the customer. The customer will then need to log into their account through the link in the email using their account number, including the dash, as the User ID, and the new PIN that they created. The set-up process will not be complete until the log in through the link in the email.

After the set-up process has been completed, the customer will be able to make payments, see their usage history, as well as billing history, and sign up for auto-pay payments.

Why am I being penalized?

If a bill is not paid by the due date, there is a 10% penalty added to the bill. Customers are responsible for their bill, regardless of as to whether an actual bill was received or not.

Can my penalty be waived?

Depending on the circumstances, and the credit history of the customer, there is the possibility of the penalty being waived. Customers that are approved for a waived penalty are only allotted one adjustment.

What if I fail to make payment?

If a payment has not been received by the due date, a 10% penalty will be added, and a new date will be assigned. If the payment has not been received by the new date, customers are subject to having their utility services shut-off. If a customer's services are disconnected, the customer must pay the past due bill, put down a new deposit in the amount of the past due bill, and pay a \$60.00 reconnection fee before services can be turned back on. If a customer does not call in a timely matter in the same day the water was disconnected, it may be the next business day before services can be restored.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

How do I terminate services?

It is important for customers, if they are students, to check their lease agreement for a clause on the termination of water services. Some of the major rental companies, CMG Leasing, Maple Ridge, Roanoke Street Apartments, will fine their tenants for terminating water services before their lease end date.

To terminate services, customers can just send an email to utbilling@blacksburg.gov or call us at (540) 961-1119. We just need to know the exact date they would like to terminate services, and their forwarding address to ensure that the customer receives all final billing documents and any deposit refunds they may be entitled to. When choosing a date, customers should keep in mind that we are closed on the weekends, and holidays.

I'm graduating, or moving out, and my roommates are going to take over services, can I just transfer my account to them or just change the name on my account?

No. The roommate will need to call and start services and create an account with us. Even though they have been living there and contributing to bill payments, we have no way of knowing that because their name was not on the account. If they've never had services, they will need to pay the \$40.00 deposit and \$10.00 transfer fee.

I'm moving out, and my roommate will be taking over services. How do we need to handle this situation?

There are several ways to deal with this situation.

- The current customer can choose a date to terminate services and provide us with their forwarding address; the customer would then need to let the roommate know what date they need to sign up by. In this situation, if the roommates fail to sign up for services by the termination date, we will turn the water off and they won't be able to have it turned back on until after they complete the sign up process. If they fail to call within a timely manner the day the water is turned off, it could be the next business day before the technician can turn it back on.
- In order to prevent a lapse in service, the new customer can call and sign up for services. When the new customer signs up, the current customer is automatically terminated. The current customer would just need to call us within a few days of the time the roommates are supposed to sign up for services to make sure that everything has been taken out of their name, and to provide us with their forwarding address. If possible, this way tends to cause the least amount of issues.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

I'm leaving for the summer, but will be back in the fall. Can I just turn my water off while I'm gone so I won't be billed for those months?

Each landlord has their own stance on this in the lease agreement. Customers may want to check the lease agreement before making any decisions regarding this matter, as some of the fines for terminating water before the lease ends are pretty hefty. The fixed fees for the summer are typically just \$6.13. The customer may also run the risk of having to pay the \$40.00 deposit and \$10.00 transfer fee again upon return before we could turn the water back on upon their return.

Why is my water bill so high this month?

If a customer receives a high water bill, it does not necessarily mean there is a leak. Higher water consumption can be credited to several things:

- More company than usual
- Watering of summer gardens
- Filling up a pool or hot tub

If none of these are circumstances apply to the customer, there is always the possibility of a leak on the property somewhere. We can send a meter technician out to check the meter for leaks, and to get a read so that we can calculate how much water was used since the last read date. The majority of the leaks reported to the Town are toilet leaks. Toilets really can use a lot more water than anyone would ever think.

I got a letter concerning my consumption with my water bill. What does that mean?

The Town sends out 2 letters with water bills. If the customer received a green letter, this means that the technicians did not go out and check the meter again. This is our generic notice, and it just lets the customer know that we noticed their consumption is higher than usual, and could be for various reasons. If the customer receives a blue letter, this means that the technician actually went out and checked the meter again.

- If there is an "X" in the box stating the meter has been checked and movement was detected, this means that the leak could be outside, or inside, but wherever it is, it was constant when the technician checked it.
- If there is an "X" in the box stating the meter has been checked and no movement was detected, this indicates that if there is a leak, it is not outside in the lines and is inside the house somewhere.

How do I know if my leak is outside or not?

If there is a leak outside in the lines, the meter is constantly moving. Usage typically continually increases with each passing bill until the leak has been fixed.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

Is there anything I can do to check for leaks myself?

There is a test that customer's can do to check their toilets themselves.

- If you take the lid off of the back of the toilet, you can place a few drops of food coloring into the tank. You must leave the toilet alone and not touch it for about an hour or so. If any of the food coloring has leaked into the bowl of the toilet, this indicates that the toilet is not working properly.
- You can also turn the water supply off to the toilet. Once the water supply has been stopped, you will need to take the lid off of the back of the toilet. You will need to mark the waterline in the tank with a pencil. If you leave the toilet alone for an hour or so, and come back and the waterline has dropped from the pencil line, this also indicates that the toilet is not running properly.

What do I do if I think I have a leak?

If the customer is renting, they need to call their landlord and report the high water bill and the possibility of a leak. Most property management companies are great about sending out maintenance people to check as soon as they are notified.

If the customer owns the property and is unable to find the leak themselves, they need to call a plumber or a maintenance technician.

Can my bill be adjusted for my high bill?

In the event that a customer has a high water bill, no leaks are detected and the usage goes back down to normal, we can do a one-time adjustment for the high bill. We do need a written request, it can be emailed, for the adjustment.

If the customer had a leak, it must be repaired before any adjustments can be given. Once the leak has been repaired, we can adjust as many as 3 of the high water bills. In order to do the adjustment, we need verification that the leak was fixed. This can be a receipt, an invoice, or an email/letter from a landlord or maintenance technician that states what was fixed, how it was fixed and the date that it was fixed.

What if I just moved in and found a leak, how will you adjust my high bill?

In order to adjust bills that don't have enough usage to accumulate an average, we do what is called a 5-day read. Our meter technicians go out, for five days, and get reads for each of those days. Based on the usage over the five day period, we calculate what the average should be based on those reads and make an adjustment using that average.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

Why is my bill still higher than average after an adjustment?

Town ordinance will allow for a customer's bill to be adjusted based on their average consumption. It does not allow for the adjustment of the whole-sale rate of the water used. The whole-sale rate is the rate the Town has already paid for the water used. This rate is why the bill is still higher than what a customer would usually pay.

What if I can't pay the total due after I've had a leak?

Customers will be required to pay what they can of the bill and arrangements can be made for the remaining balance on the account.

My trash or recycling was missed, what do I do?

If the customer set their trash out prior to 7:00 a.m. the day their waste was supposed to be picked up, we just need to know their address and the customer will be added to the "Missed List" so that Waste Industries knows to go back and get it. The customer should leave their trash or recycling out, so that it can be picked up. Their missed items will be collected within 24 hours of reporting the missed pick-up.

We have more trash than our carts can hold. How do we get an additional cart?

An additional cart can be delivered for customers. This will increase their bill by \$22.20 for each additional cart requested. If a customer requests an additional cart, they must keep this cart for an entire year before they can choose to have it re-collected in the event that they do not want it anymore.

I've heard that my trash can be picked up at my door, how do I get this service?

The Town does offer a backdoor pick-up service for customers over 65 years of age, and to those with disabilities that hinder them from taking their carts to the curb. In order to receive this service, customers must fill out an application, which can be obtained from our office, and mail it back to us.

I have a complaint, or specific question regarding trash and recycling. Who do I need to talk to?

Customers need to direct these calls to Karen Day, solid waste operations coordinator, at Public Works. Her number is (540) 961-1806.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

I need to schedule a special pick-up for extra trash that I have. What does that entail?

Special pick-ups are available to customers that are on the Town's trash service. A special pick-up is \$65.00, and they will pick up as much as will fit in a dump truck load. The \$65.00 is a pre-paid fee which can be taken over the phone with a Visa or MasterCard. If the customer cannot pay over the phone, they will need to pay in person at the municipal building to reserve a pick-up. If a customer needs brush picked up, they cannot mix in miscellaneous household items and vice versa. A special pick-up can be used for many different things, like carpet, mattresses, couches, brush, etc. They are completed every Friday and we can only take 8 reservations per week. If a customer wishes to sign up for a specific Friday, they need to call by 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, of that week, in order to reserve a spot on the list.

I plant a garden and water all summer long. Is there any way I can get any relief on my sewer for this water used?

The Town does offer an irrigation service for customers. Irrigation meters are available for purchase here in the office, for \$120.00 each. Our meter technicians go out once a year, at the end of the summer, and gather the readings of the irrigation meters we have on file. The usage on the meter is calculated and credit is applied to the customer's sewer charges, for the water used outside on their sewer service.

I don't want to purchase an irrigation meter, but I have to fill up a pool? Is there anything I can do to get credit on my sewer?

There are loaner irrigation meters here in the office. A customer can come in and sign-out a loaner meter if they need to. They can only keep the meter for two weeks, and when they return the meter, the credit for the water used will be applied to their next bill. The loaner irrigation meters are typically used by customers that have pools, or hot tubs, or have just planted things that need heavy watering for the first couple of days.

I didn't get credit on my bill this year for my irrigation meter. What do I need to do?

The customer can call with the read from their meter and they will receive credit on their next bill. If they are unable to reach the meter, we can create a work order to have our technicians go out and get a read for the customer.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

Rates

Effective July 1, 2014

	Water	Sewer
Inside Town Limits		
Fixed Charges	\$3.05	\$3.08
Volume (per 1,000 gallons)	\$4.88	\$5.17
Outside Town Limits		
Fixed Charges	\$5.33	\$5.39
Volume (per 1,000 gallons)	\$8.52	\$9.04

Trash & Recycling

\$22.20 per trash cart

Fire Protection Fee

\$16.10

Stormwater Fee

\$6.00/Single Family Residence

What is a stormwater fee, and why am I being charged?

The Town of Blacksburg is responsible for managing the stormwater within its limits and uses the revenue accrued from this fund to implement preventative projects. For single family residences, the billing amount will be a flat fee of \$6.00 per residence. For all other properties, the bill amount is based on the impervious surface area of a customer's property.

For specific information regarding the stormwater fee, for instance why am I being charged for 2 units, or discretions a customer may have regarding their bill, calls should be directed to Kafi Howard at (540) 961-1124.

What is the fire protection fee?

The fire protection fee is a charge that customers only receive if they are outside Town limits. Customers that receive this fee have the ability, and have been given the opportunity, to hookup to Town water, but choose not to do so. This is for customers that are on a well.

How often do rates increase?

If the Town raises the rates, it will be effective as of July 1st of each year. A notice is sent out in the bills to notify customers of the rate increases in June of that year.

Utility Billing: Frequently Asked Questions

How much will my bill be for the address I'm moving into?

Average Bill Based on 2,000 Gallons a Person
Inside Town Limits

# of Residents	Water	Sewer	Trash	Total w/ Trash	Total w/o Trash
1	12.81	13.42	22.20	48.43	26.23
2	22.57	23.76	22.20	68.53	46.33
3	32.33	34.10	22.20	88.63	66.43
4	42.09	44.44	22.20	108.73	86.53
5	51.85	54.78	22.20	128.83	106.63
6	61.61	65.12	22.20	148.93	126.73