

Is my water meter billing me accurately?

This is a common concern with water users all over the country. When an unusually large water bill comes in, the first thought in many people's mind is "We couldn't have used that much water, the water meter must be wrong!" In virtually all cases, the problem is not with the water meter; the meter is just showing how much water really went through the meter.



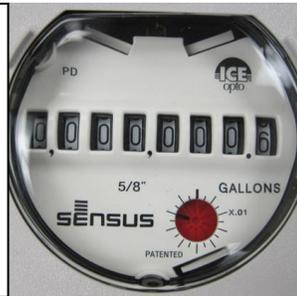
Well, how do I read my meter?

In St. Albans, most residential meters will look like this picture, (see the last page if your meter looks different):

(The water meter is typically found in the basement, near the wall where the water pipe comes in from the street.)



If you look down at the meter from above, the top of the meter looks like this. Notice that this looks like a car's odometer. You read it the same way, except that you are reading gallons instead of miles.



St. Albans bills for water in units of 100 Gallons. When meters are read by the city, the meter provides the numbers showing on the 100,000 gallon digit down to the 100 gallon digit, (the second through fifth digits).

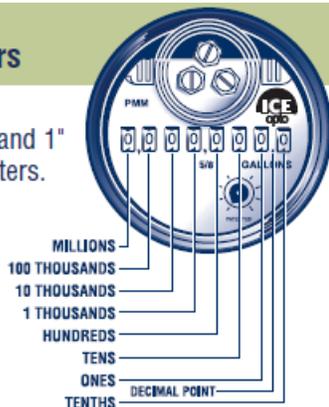
For example, say you looked at the meter and it showed 9,876,543.2. This means that nine million, eight hundred seventy six thousand, five hundred forty three gallons and two tenths went through the meter since it was manufactured. The reading the City would receive would be "8765".

On your water bill, you would see 876500* in the box labelled "Current Reading". A somewhat smaller number would show in the box labelled "Previous Reading", because that is what the meter reported three months earlier. The difference in these two numbers is shown as "Amount Used", and that is what your bill is based on.

(* Two zeroes are added for clarity, to show how many gallons of water have been consumed. The City charges for units of 100 gallons)

Gallons Registers

Sensus
5/8", 3/4" and 1"
SR II® meters.



OK, I can read my water meter every day, but I know it is reading high. We just couldn't use as much water as the City is charging us for!

Again, this is a common concern with water consumers when they get a high water bill. But the simple truth is that water meters never read inaccurately high. As mechanical meters wear out, they sometimes read low, and undercharge you; but they simply don't read high.

How can I believe that my water meter isn't running high, showing gallons than I really use?

Well, how about this easy test:

- Make sure no one in the house is using water for a few minutes.
- Read the meter, and write down all 8 digits.
- Fill a five gallon pail with water, and then read the meter again.
- Subtract the first reading from the second. It should be pretty close to five gallons higher on the second read.
- If the two readings aren't 5 gallons apart, you might not have filled the pail to the exact 5 gallon mark.
- If it reads higher than 5 gallons, you may have something in the house using water! Time to go looking for that water bandit!

OK, I'm using a lot of water. But where is that water going?

- The most common "water bandit" in homes is the toilet. A leak that you can't hear may be costing you one half gallon per minute. That little trickle adds up to 64,800 gallons every billing period! Be aware that some toilet leaks come and go. They may leak for a while and then stop for a while. If in doubt, contact a plumber.
- Sometimes folks have leaky fitting somewhere in the house, maybe in the basement where you don't notice it. You might have a faucet that you can't quite turn off, and it runs constantly. Be aware that a stream of water only 1/16" in diameter will waste 74,000 gallons of water, each billing period.

I'm confused. What more can I do?

We want to help you conserve water and keep your water bill affordable. If you need help, give us a call. We may be able to help you track down your water losses. We are on your side.

A few newer meters in the City look like this. Just flip up the cover to read the meter. It has 9 digits, but it reads the same as the older meters. Call us if you have questions about this.

