

10. CONSIDERATION OF A WATER LEAK BILLING ADJUSTMENT POLICY

In June 2006, when transitioning from flat rates to metered rates for County water and sewer customers, the Board adopted a sewer adjustment policy to address the issue of leaks on the customer side of the meter (copy attached). Because leaked water never enters the sewer system, it is fair and reasonable for an adjustment to be made to the customer's sewer bill.

At the time, however, a similar policy wasn't developed for water bill adjustments. The prevailing logic was that even though the water hadn't been used, it had been furnished, and the customer still had a responsibility to pay for it.

In the last 90 days, however, we've had three (3) residential water customers connected to different County systems (Branchville, Newsoms and Edgehill) who experienced significant leaks. Through no fault of his own, one customer in Branchville lost more than 300,000 gallons before his leak was discovered and repaired, incurring water and sewer charges in excess of \$4,000.

While we were able to adjust this customer's sewer bill based on the current policy, more than \$1,600 remains on his water bill because of the leak. Another customer in Newsoms had similar circumstances, but to a lesser degree. However, even after adjusting her sewer bill, more than \$700 remains for excess water charges.

Attached for your consideration please find a copy of a proposed water leak billing adjustment policy. It very closely mirrors our sewer adjustment policy and provides us some latitude for fairness in extenuating circumstances.

MOTION REQUIRED: If the Board is so inclined, a motion is required to approve the attached policy.

Southampton County Water Leak Billing Adjustment Policy

Purpose and Scope:

The purpose of this policy is to provide the Southampton County Department of Utilities with a written policy regarding billing adjustments for water leaks on the customer (or property) side of the meter, or significant abnormalities in water consumption.

Introduction:

Customers are responsible for the service and fittings to the County Water Utility System beginning at the coupling on the customer's side of the meter. Any leaks in the line which are the responsibility of the customers must be repaired, by the customer, solely at their expense.

No adjustment or credit will be applied to the water bill for the customer for property side leaks, damage or deterioration or other factors except as defined within this policy. Water billing adjustments will not be provided for the filling of fishponds, watering of yards or gardens, the washing of vehicles, or for leaks associated with faucets or fixtures (bad valves, stems, washers, broken handles, leaking tanks, running toilets, etc.)

The customer is responsible for monitoring higher than expected usage. Customers must investigate higher than expected usage to determine if the usage was caused by a property side leak. Upon request, the County Department of Utilities staff will provide a no charge, on-site visit. Customers should promptly repair leaks.

Property Side Leaks - Billing Adjustment Criteria:

The Director of Utilities may adjust water billings when all of the following requirements are met:

1. Customer shall notify the County and complete a Courtesy Leak Adjustment Application for the period in which the loss occurred.
2. The Director of Utilities, or his designated representative, shall inspect the property and verify that the leak has been repaired. If repairs are completed by a third party, receipts can be provided in lieu of visual inspection.
3. Only one property side leak adjustment shall be allowed in each 12 month period. The 12 month period begins the first month of the billing period following the billing period the Leak Adjustment Application covered. For example, if the Leak Adjustment Application was for a bill covering January, the 12 month period commences on February 1.
4. The customer's account must be in good standing at the time of the Courtesy Leak Adjustment Application submission.
5. The amount of the excess usage shall be determined by the Director of Utilities. Excess usage, as a result of a property side leak, must exceed average normal consumption by at least twenty-five percent (25%). Average normal consumption shall
6. Adjustments will be provided for a maximum of two months (current month and one month preceding) based upon the customer's usage during the same two months, one year prior. If this information is unavailable, the adjustment shall equal an average of the previous three months.

SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY
SEWER ADJUSTMENT POLICY

Adjustments to the customer's sewer usage will be given under the following circumstances: 1) water leaks originating under the house; 2) water leaks originating underground; 3) broken hot water heaters; 4) broken or leaking water pipes inside walls; 5) other leaks as may be witnessed by authorized county personnel. No adjustments will be provided for leaks associated with faucets or fixtures (bad valve, stems, washer, broken handles, tank replacement, etc.)

Adjustments will be provided for a maximum of two months (current month and one month preceding) based upon the customer's usage during the same two months, one year prior. If this information is unavailable, the adjustment shall equal an average of the previous three months. Proof of repair must be provided before any adjustments will be considered. Proof of repair must include a copy of the repair bill from a licensed plumber clearly stating the nature of the problem and the repairs performed. If a repair is made by the homeowner, a copy of the receipt for all materials utilized in repairing the problem and a statement detailing the problem and type of repair must be submitted.

Limits on adjustments - there shall be no more than one sewer usage adjustment for any account in a 12-month period.

Swimming pools - customers filling their swimming pools will be provided a sewer adjustment provided they contact the Southampton County Department of Public Utilities BEFORE they fill the pool. Department personnel will record the water meter reading before the pool is filled and make arrangements to re-read the meter after the pool is filled. Sewer charges will not be imposed for the number of gallons utilized during this period. There shall be no more than one sewer adjustment for the filling of swimming pools in any 12-month period.

No sewer adjustments will be provided for the filling of fishponds, watering of yards or gardens, or the washing of vehicles.

APPROVED BY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS: JUNE 26, 2006