

SUGGESTIONS FOR TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR HIGH WATER BILLS

As many of you know, I'm not an engineer. The items I share below are the result of my discovery and research. I provide them here to help you maneuver your own research as you deal with Department of Watershed Management (DWM). Following these steps does not ensure that you will: (1) determine the cause of your high water bills, (2) guarantee that the DWM will respond in a timely manner, or (3) solve your issues with the DWM. These steps are merely provided because I hope to streamline your efforts, provide you with more information when you interact with the DWM, and ideally help remove a few possible causes to your billing problems.

1. In any communication, focus on the CCF amount and not the dollar amount. A cubic foot of water = 7.48 gallons, therefore a CCF (100 CF) = 748 gallons of water. The CCF is the standard unit of measure and does not change as rates increase. Referring to changes in your bill based on this standard unit of measure will help normalize your historical usage.
2. **Always** take the name, date, time and outcome of any call you have with DWM representative – ANY representative.
3. If possible, keep all communication (esp written) factual rather than emotional.
4. You can download a 12 month history of your water usage directly from the DWM website. Visit: www.atlantawatershed.org and click on "Billing" tab at the top (pull down menu) and select "Online payment". By creating an account, you'll be able to download 12 month of usage into a CSV file which opens easily into an Excel spreadsheet
5. Review your bills over the past number of months (# of months will depend on your situation). You may find a change in the meter number which should correspond with a "Previous Meter Read" of 0 (zero). This will indicate you've had a new meter installed. If you have had a "Previous read" = 0, yet your meter number did not change, make sure you note the date/month.
6. If you can remove your meter cover, I suggest you complete the following troubleshooting tests:
 - a. Verify the meter number from your bill with the imprinted number. This number will be located either on a brass plate or the arm of a pipe coming into the meter (those are the only locations I've seen however, yours may be located in a different place.)
 - b. Take note of the entire reading on the dial (the dials that resemble an odometer on your car). In particular, note the very far right number in black – which is the smallest unit (the cubic foot). The numbers in white should correspond closely with your most recent bill's "Current Meter Read" (allowing for water use since the bill reading date and any numerical rounding)
 - c. Ensure that no water is running anywhere in your home and conduct a "Bucket Test".
 - i. Get a bucket that is marked with volume (example: 3 gallon bucket)
 - ii. Since ONE CF = 7.48 gallons, you are going to test that the equipment is working properly by drawing that amount from your spigot. Once you draw ~7.5 gallons, you should see the very far right hand digit moves a single revolution (ex: started at 3 on the far right black digit so after drawing ~7.5 gallons, it reads 4)
 - iii. If the far right digit moves one unit after pulling the water, then it's probably safe to say that your water meter is working properly.
 - d. If water meter # matches and the "bucket test" checks out, there is only 1 more area that I can suggest to check. I want you to document your "frequency #" or the "MIU" number. MIU stands for "meter interface unit" and it's another identifier that the city uses to identify your meter belongs to your house and matches your usage. It's the number of the box that is hanging under the water meter's lid so that the trucks driving down the street can capture your meter reading.

- i. Write down the # printed in larger font on the side of the digital box hanging between the cover and the meter head
- ii. There are 2 numbers - one in larger type font and one in smaller font –you want the larger font number
- iii. This number will NOT appear on your bill
- iv. You will have to try to get someone from DWM customer service to look up your home’s MIU / Frequency number. Don’t be shocked if they are not familiar with either of these terms. The number is listed in their computer system if they click on your account number which should take them to another screen. The field where this MIU (or frequency number) is stored in their computer system is on the secondary screen and the field name is listed as “Secondary Identification” (I believe). Ask them to read the number off to you for verification. Document what number they provide to you.

Once you complete these troubleshooting steps, I encourage you to send an email to:

Watershedhelp@atlwater.com , copy Ms. Erica Cockfield at: Erica.cockfield@atlwater.com and Deputy Commissioner Sheila Pierce at Scpierce@atlantaga.gov as well as your city councilman (Howard Shook’s email is: hshook@atlantaga.gov for example).

Include the following in your e-mail to the city:

- Your name, home address, the phone number at which you want to be contacted
- Your water account number
- Why you are concerned about your water bill.
- The answers you have gotten to the steps outlined above.

By outlining all the efforts you have taken to ensure that you’ve done all that you can, I would suggest requesting that an experienced field technician come to your home and if possible, schedule that appointment so that you can watch, listen, and learn what is done.

It seems to me that if the DWM is asking us to pay for water usage, they should be able to justify how they came up the number.

If you have any questions, please let me know. I’ll help in any way that I can.

Sincerely,
Kristy Gillmann, President Peachtree Hills Civic Association

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10/09/09