



## Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

# CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

### Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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## A Guide to Your

# WATER BILL AND SERVICE



A water bill has a variety of information that must be included, according to Ohio law. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) developed this fact sheet to help you better understand your water bill and service.

### Usage and meter reading

#### Water usage

Depending upon the kind of meter you have, water usage is measured in hundred cubic feet (Ccf) or gallons (gal). Many companies list just the number of units used without adding "Ccf" or gal to the usage amount.

#### Types of readings

Your water company may read your meter or estimate how much water you use each billing cycle. An actual meter reading shows the exact amount of water you have used. An estimated reading is determined by looking at the usage for the same period during past years. You

can request an actual meter reading at any time.

### Fees and charges

You will see several charges on your bill that help account for the total amount due.

- ▶ **Service Charges** – a fixed, monthly charge that each customer pays for receiving service. Generally, there is a charge for both water and wastewater (sewer) service;
- ▶ **Water Volume** – the amount of water used multiplied by the rate charged for water;
- ▶ **Wastewater Volume** – the amount of water that was used or emptied into the sewer system multiplied by the rate charged for sewer services; and
- ▶ **Other Current Charges** – charges for a line protection program or for water softening provided by the water company could be listed.

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### Required items on bills

Water companies are required to list certain information on your bill. Each company must include:

- ▶ Customer name, address (both billing and service) and account number;
- ▶ Complete company name, mailing address and telephone number;
- ▶ Address for payments;
- ▶ Billing and payment due dates;
- ▶ Amount due if paid on or before due date and amount due if paid after due date;
- ▶ Dates of service covered by the bill;
- ▶ For metered service, previous and current meter readings and volumes billed;
- ▶ Any applicable late charges or credits;
- ▶ Rate schedule for service or a statement to the effect that the rate schedule will be furnished upon request; and
- ▶ Whether the bill is for an actual or estimated meter reading.

### Why should you read your bill?

You should read your bill each month to know what charges appear on the bill and your normal water usage. Also, the company may place important notices and other updates on the bill.

### Frequently asked questions about your water service

#### Q. Are all water companies in Ohio regulated by the state?

A. No, the water service that comes from a municipal, county, water district or cooperative is not regulated by the state.

#### Q. Why can there be a difference in rates between state regulated and non-regulated water companies?

A. Variables, such as system size, number of years the current rate has been effective, the treatment process used to make the water drinkable, among other factors, play a role in determining the rates that a company

charges. State-regulated companies also are typically operated as for-profit corporations and pay income tax based upon their sales and other financial variables. On the other hand, municipal, county, cooperatives and regional water districts may not.

#### Q. Who is responsible for repairing leaks in the water line?

A. Consumers are responsible for repairs to the service line as well as all pipes inside the residence. The service line runs from the curb to the residence. All other lines are the water system's responsibility. While the water company owns the meter, any damage that occurs to the meter is the customer's responsibility.

#### Q. What can a consumer do about low water pressure?

A. A minimum pressure of 35 pounds per square-inch (psi) must be maintained in the distribution system, according to Ohio law. If consumers experience a drop in water pressure, they should contact the water company immediately and should not consume any tap water until checking with the company.

#### Q. What should consumers do if their water appears rusty or discolored?

A. Water can become discolored if water pressure is significantly lower than normal. The discolored water may be caused by a routine flushing of the distribution system in the area or a water main break, so consumers should contact the water company before drinking or using any discolored water.

If no system flushing or water line break has occurred, the company may be having problems at its treatment plant with iron or manganese removal. Check with the company to see if this is true. No matter what the answer, request that the water company investigate your problem and possibly flush the distribution system. The company should notify all affected consumers before flushing the system.

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at [www.occ.ohio.gov](http://www.occ.ohio.gov).



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Consumers who continually have discolored or hard water may want to consider installing a softening system. Water softeners may help eliminate iron problems, as well as reduce the hardness of the water.

**Q. What can a consumer do about hard water?**

- A. Calcium and magnesium typically cause water hardness. Consumers can contact their water company to determine if it provides softened water and if so, if there are any treatment problems.

Water hardness is considered a personal preference, so consumers may want to consider purchasing a water softener if the water company does not soften the water for them or to accompany measures that the company already has implemented. Hard water can cause irritation to the skin and make hair look dull and lifeless. There are inexpensive home testing kits available to check water hardness levels, which can be purchased at local pool and spa retail stores. Some independent water treatment companies even provide testing services or send water test kits free of charge.

Since the water softening process involves the use of sodium, dietary restrictions should be considered when determining your water hardness preference.

**Q. What are recommend levels of hardness for water?**

- A. The Ohio EPA does not require that water be softened by water companies. Water that is softened is recommended to have a finished hardness of 120-150 mg/L (7-9 grains per gallon). It can be softened to as low as 80 mg/liter (5 grains per gallon). Any lower and consumers run the risk of corrosive water and other problems.

**Q. What causes water to be cloudy when using an indoor sink?**

- A. Water can appear cloudy when it comes from the tap because it is no longer under pressure and the dissolved air is released as bubbles. As the bubbles rise and disappear, the water clears.

**Q. Who can a consumer contact with questions if his or her service provider is a municipal, county or cooperative?**

- A. The telephone number should be listed on the utility bill or try contacting one of the following entities:
- ▶ **City** – City Councilman, Mayor, and/or Service Safety Director depending upon the type of government serving the community.
  - ▶ **County** – County Commissioners
  - ▶ **Water and/or Sewer District** – District Governing Board.
  - ▶ **Cooperative** – (not-for-profit water/sewer companies owned by the company's customers).

These entities typically are governed by a board and will have articles of incorporation filed with the secretary of state as well as bylaws that will detail how the cooperative functions. The customer may want to refer to these documents prior to contacting the board.

