

Water Meters and Water Conservation

It is important for consumers to conserve water and potentially save on utility bills. It is also important to know where the water meter is located and how to properly read the meter.

Conserving Water

If you conserve water, you may also save money, and not just on water bills. When you use less hot water, you use less energy, which may lower electric or natural gas bills. When you use less water, you may also lower sewer bills by putting less water down sewer drains.

Easy ways to save water:

- Consider buying water-efficient appliances such as dishwashers and washing machines and low-flow fixtures such as toilets, faucet aerators, and shower heads.
- To check for toilet leaks, add food coloring to the back tank. If there is a leak, food color will appear in the bowl within one hour.
- Repair dripping faucets and shower heads.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator instead of using water.
- Wash fruits and vegetables in a bowl of water.
- Limit use of the garbage disposal.
- Make sure there is a full load before running the dishwasher or washing machine.
- Instead of running water down the drain, consider saving it for watering plants or cleaning.
- Raise your lawn mower blade to at least 3 inches. Taller grass holds soil moisture better.
- Use mulch around trees and plants.
- Water the lawn for long periods of time each week in the early morning, instead of each day. Water will evaporate less, and water pressure is usually higher early in the day.

Average Water Consumption

Running the faucet
2-5 gallons/minute

Flushing the toilet
1-7 gallons/flush

Taking a shower
2-7 gallons/minute

Running dishwasher
4-6 gallons/cycle

Taking a bath
36 gallons/bath

Running the garden hose
5-10 gallons/minute

Washing clothes
15-30 gallons/load

Water Bills

Utilities do not always use the same format for water bills. Below is information that should always be listed on your water bill.

- Begin/End Meter Read
- Date of meter read
- Number and type of units measured (Gallons or Cubic Feet)
- Total Amount Due
- A marking to denote an estimated bill
- Date Payment Due
- Date of Bill
- Number of Days in bill period
- Telephone number to contact water utility at all hours
- Applicable rate schedule



Locating a Water Meter

Your water meter is generally located near the street in front of your home. Meters typically have an iron or plastic lid and are housed in a concrete box flush with the ground.

Reading a Water Meter

Use caution when removing the lid covering the meter to avoid damaging the meter and check for insects that may be nesting in the meter box.



The meter will have seven- or eight-digit numbers that show the total gallons used since the meter was installed. To figure out how much water you have used, choose a date to record the number on the meter. This is the first reading. At a later date, check the number again for a second reading.

Use this formula to calculate the amount used:
Second reading - First reading = Gallons used.

Water Leaks

To check for a water leak, turn off all indoor and outdoor water-using devices—including less obvious ones such as water softeners and ice makers—before reading the meter. Wait 30 minutes and check the meter again. If the number is different, you have a water leak.

ORS Consumer Services Can Help

If you've spoken with your utility and still need help, ORS Consumer Services can contact the company on your behalf. The ORS can check to see whether the utility has followed all applicable regulations. Staff can also direct you to social services agencies that may have available funds to assist with your utility bills.

About the Office of Regulatory Staff

The ORS represents consumers of investor-owned utilities in South Carolina before the PSC. The PSC is the state agency that sets utilities' rates. The ORS must look at the impact to the consumer and utilities' continued investment in reliable and high-quality services.

