



Waukesha Water Utility

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New Sewer Credit Meter Ordinance Supports Waukesha's Water Conservation Program

Waukesha, WI – Waukesha's sewer credit meter ordinance was recently revised to better support Waukesha's water conservation efforts.

Waukesha's conservation program is an important factor leading to its ability to secure water from Lake Michigan. The recent ordinance change is aimed at reducing water use for activities that are considered non-essential, such as outdoor water use.

"Water sprinkling drives up costs for the utility and for all customers, not just for the customer doing the sprinkling" according to Donna Scholl, the administrative services manager of the Waukesha Water Utility. "Our systems must be built to meet peak demands, which occur during warm, dry weather. The higher the peak demand, the higher the costs for everyone."

She added that the utility must pump its wells harder to meet peak demands, which increases radium levels. "A major reason we are in interim compliance with our radium order is that our customers have reduced lawn sprinkling," she said.

Customers used sewer credit meters to avoid wastewater charges on water used for lawn sprinkling. Scholl said, "The meters saved money for individual customers, but encouraged activities that drove up costs for everyone else. So the new ordinance phases out the meters."

Prior to the ordinance change, customers who had a sewer credit meter could have their wastewater bill reduced by the amount of water used outdoors; however, as of January 1, 2017, sewer credit meter accounts, that have been in place for more than seven years, will be ended.

Sewer credit meters that have been in place for less than seven years, will be phased out. Scholl said, "We calculated that it takes an average of seven years for customers to recover the money they spent for the meter and installation costs. Therefore, sewer credit meters that were installed between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2016, will expire seven years from the date they were installed."

Waukesha Water Utility mailed over 2,800 letters to the affected customers, regarding the ordinance revision. Customers have until January 10, 2017 to submit a final reading for their final credit.

The letters also asked customers to consider changing how they use water. For instance, established lawns do not need to be watered. When established lawns turn brown in the summer, they don't die; instead, they go dormant.

For years, the utility has been educating people that established lawns do not need to be watered. The utility gives out free lawn signs that read "*My Brown Lawn is Green*" and promotes using rain barrels.

Outdoor water usage is the biggest factor in non-essential water consumption. Scholl added that, "We are required by the Great Lakes Compact to conserve water. Therefore, we must do everything we can to curb consumption; but, regardless of the Compact, conserving this natural resource is the right thing to do."