

Fact Sheet

The City of San Diego Public Utilities Department

Water Rates and Notification (and how to keep your bill down)



California Aqueduct

The Public Utilities Department knows how important each dollar is to San Diegans. We are constantly striving to be as efficient and cost-effective as possible. From becoming more streamlined by merging the water and sewer departments into one to reduce personnel costs, we work as hard as you to make each dollar stretch as far as possible.

However, there are times when the Department must bring forward rate increases. These are mainly due to two different factors. They are:

- Due to an increase in the wholesale cost of water.
- To pay for improvements to the water and/or sewer systems.

Before the Department raises water or sewer rates, it must notify the public in advance. The rules governing this notification are contained in California Proposition 218. This Proposition was passed by the voters of California in November 1996. Before City Council approves either of these types of rate increases, a Prop. 218 Notice is sent to every account holder. These Notices are sent more than 45 days prior to the City Council hearing. In order to make them as noticeable as possible we do not hide them in the water bills but send out a colorful notice directly to all customers.

As part of the Prop. 218 rules, we include a form that makes it easy for customers to protest the increase. We also make the form available on the Internet in Spanish and Tagalog as well as English.

Wholesale Cost of Water Increases

Once a year the agencies that the Public Utilities Department buys water from reassess the rates for which they sell water. If those rates go up due to increases in those agency's costs, the wholesale price of water goes up. If this occurs the Public Utilities Department may increase water rates to pay for this increase. This is called a "Pass-Through" rate increase.

These rate increases by the San Diego County Water Authority (CWA) apply to all county water agencies, including the City. Because local water supplies are very limited, the City



Alvarado Water Treatment Plant



Pt. Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant

A water resource strategy that includes planning, conservation, recycled water, groundwater, water reuse, and watershed and resource protection is helping to meet future water needs.



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO



Public Information Office 10/05/10

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must buy approximately 85 – 90% of the water it supplies to our customers from the CWA. Because the City is required to recover the costs for water purchases, it must “pass through” these increased charges to its own customers.

The CWA bases its increases on the costs for its own infrastructure, operations and maintenance. Information about the CWA and its expenses can be found at www.sdcwa.org.

The CWA increases also reflect the cost it pays to purchase water from the region’s largest water wholesaler, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD).

Currently the CWA is suing MWD over its rate increases. Information about the lawsuit can be found at www.sdcwa.org/news/2010_0610_mwdratechallenge.phtml

Unfortunately, these type of “Pass Through” rate increases do not include any expenditure for City infrastructure, operations or maintenance.

City of San Diego Rate Increases

The Public Utilities Department has a responsibility to ensure that San Diegans have safe, reliable water and sewer systems. While constantly striving to be as efficient and cost-effective as possible, there are reasons for rate increases. These include, but are not limited to:

- New local, state or federal rules or regulations
- Aging infrastructure
- Increases in costs for things such as electricity, gas, and materials

Unlike the Pass-Through rate increase where none of the money stays with the City, when the Public Utilities Department implements a rate increase 100 percent of that increase goes towards improving the Department. Increases such as these pay for new water or sewer pipelines, improved treatment plants, more efficient pump stations, etc. They help make the water and sewer systems safer and more dependable.

The Public Utilities Department takes rate increases very seriously. We are constantly working to keep rates as low as possible. For more information about water rates, visit our Water Rates Information Page. (<http://www.sandiego.gov/water/rates/>)

How You Can Help Keep Your Bill Down

Your water and sewer bills can be lower if you decrease the amount of water you use. Lots of San Diegans are conserving. During the past year we’ve seen a decrease of about 10 percent in the amount of water used. Also, your sewer bill is partially based upon the amount of water you use during the winter months (<http://www.sandiego.gov/water/rates/winter.shtml>). So by saving water in the winter, you could see the benefits for a whole year.

The Public Utilities Department’s Water Conservation Program stands ready to help you conserve water. Visit us at <http://www.sandiego.gov/water/> and check out all the great programs we have designed to help San Diegans decrease the amount of water they use. One of the most popular programs is the FREE Residential Water Survey Program. As part of this program, a Water Conservation expert will tour your property to identify leaks and water-saving opportunities. Call (619) 570-1999 or email us at water@sandiego.gov to set up an appointment.



An expert can come to your home to help show you how to save water.

Also on the web page is a Watering Calculator that can help you determine the exact amount of water your landscaping needs.