

City of Spokane Utility Billing is Getting an Upgrade!



In the nearly 25 years since the City of Spokane last replaced its utility billing system, much has changed with technology, online capabilities, access to data, customer invoice receipt and payment tools, etc. **The platform the City has been operating on doesn't contemplate much of the online transaction features that many customers have become accustomed to in today's world.** The replacement of the aging software platform provides:

- Better customer interaction and communication with utility customers
- Enhanced automatic payment capabilities
- Paperless invoicing
- Future smartphone app support
- Process flow that increases staff efficiencies
- Access to user-based reporting tools and data sets for customer trending and analytics
- Increased efficiencies help better manage rate changes over time
- Water conservation – aquifer health, river health, ordinance compliance
- System efficiencies with water delivery and storage information

You've got questions? We've got answers!

What differences will utility customers see on their bill?

- We recognize that approximately 46% of our customers have water meters read every two months in bi-monthly read cycles. **All of these customers will see an increase in their amount due in Nov. or Dec. as the system transitions.** The majority of customers will see an increase of less than \$20. Approximately 5% of all customers will see an amount greater than \$20. [Payment arrangements](#) can be made if customers need to spread the amount out over time. Recently, when the water meter was read, the usage was then split in half and then billed out over the following two months. Unfortunately, this caused many customers to be billed for warmer months usage well into late fall and colder months well into early spring.
- In the new billing system meters will continue to be read every other month, however in a current timeframe vs. two months behind, with the bill to reflect an amount due based on the actual meter read. **The next month's bill will then reflect an estimated read based on historical usage. The third month, another actual read will be obtained, and the prior estimated read will be reconciled** and adjusted (up or down) and will be reflected in that same month's billing.
- Water **consumption will be measured in cubic feet (CF) instead of hundreds of cubic feet (CCFs) units displayed as gallons.** This is sort of like measures in miles vs. kilometers. Water meters read in cubic feet and it is consistent with current SMC code language, [utility rate information](#) and other communications.
- **Account numbers will be changed as part of the upgraded system.** This will happen automatically and be reflected on utility bills. The former account number will still be usable and recognized for an extended grace period.
- The water usage comparison graph will not appear on bills for at least the first year. The new system requires a full year of data in order to provide this information automatically. Customers can contact utility billing if they would like to know what prior usage is from previous calendar years.
- Keep in mind, [utility rates](#) change every year in January.

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When will monthly billing begin?

- Billing days of the month (i.e.: the 5th of every month) will remain the same. The transition will begin Tuesday, Nov. 1. Paperless customers will see bills online as soon Nov. 1 and bills sent through the mail will begin receiving them upon standard USPS delivery times.

When will customers see a change in their utility bill?

- Customers should see their new monthly bill in Nov. or possibly Dec.

What is the difference between bi-monthly meter reads and monthly meter reads?

- Bi-monthly meter read customers have had their meter read every two months; then the charges were divided in half and billed over two months. **The new billing system reads the meter and estimates the next month's charge based on historical account consumption data.** At the next month the actual meter reading is reconciled with the estimated read either up or down which could equal a slight increase or credit on the bill. This provides an automatic estimate calculation for the months in between actual reads and generates bill amounts closer to the read dates within the actual usage period and reduces the confusion customers have experienced with seasonal swings in water consumption.

Will there be changes for auto-pay customers?

- No, there will not be any change for auto-pay customers. If signed up for auto-pay, customer payments will be taken using their previous provided payment information on the due date of following business day.

Will there be changes if a customer used Pay-by-Phone?

- No, there will not be any changes to the Pay-by-Phone system. Customers will be able to use either their old or new account number when using the Pay-by-Phone system through the extended grace period.

Will there be changes for bill-pay service through my bank or credit union?

- No, there will not be any changes for customers who pay through their bank or credit union.

Will I need to set up a new eBill web account?

- No, Utility customers do not need to create a new online payment account in the utility bill system. Account numbers will automatically be changed.
- Customers will be opted into paperless billing as part of the transition, and customers will now have ability to remove eBill accounts by using a new "Remove Account" feature.
- All new customers signing up for eBill will now automatically be enrolled in electronic billing (new eBill customers will not have option for both paper and eBill).

I have a billing question; how can I get help?

- Utility bill questions can be directed to City staff by dialing My Spokane 311 inside City boundaries or (509) 755-2489. Phone calls are answered Monday-Friday between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. (excluding some holidays) or customers can email staff 24 hours a day at ubill@spokanecity.org.

We appreciate your patience and business during this transition!

