



Northern Colorado Water Association
P.O. BOX 415 WELLINGTON, COLORADO 80549 PHONE 568-3975

NCWA Members

Subject: High Water Bills

Dear NCWA Member:

The Northern Colorado Water Association (NCWA) is aware that, from time-to-time, Members will receive water bills that exceed their budgetary expectations. Included below is an outline of our general approach for addressing high-water bills, some general information that you may find useful in understanding potential causes of high-water bills and, what you can do in the event you receive a high-water bill.

Our general approach for addressing high-water bills includes the following.

- 1) As staff completes monthly billings, abnormalities are flagged for review by the General Manager who, in turn, will contact Members to discuss billing specifics, to gain an understanding if the usage was or wasn't expected and to try and ascertain if there may be concerns with the water meter and/or leaks downstream of the meter. Members should note that NCWA is responsible for operations and maintenance of the water system through the meter pit - water usage, including leaks downstream of the meter are the responsibility of the Member.
- 2) If directed by the General Manager, Operations will contact the Member to schedule a manual read of the meter. Concurrent with the Manual read, operations staff will also work with Members to witness the meter leak detection system with the Member. The meter leak detection system helps determine if there are leaks downstream of the meter.
- 3) Operations personnel discuss their findings with the General Manager who, in turn, works with the Member to resolve billing questions.

As always, we are here to answer any questions you may have related to the NCWA water system.

Respectfully,

NORTHERN COLORADO WATER ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Cort Nickel'.

Cort D. Nickel, P.E.
General Manager

Potential Causes of High-Water Bills

An unusually high-water bill is most often caused by a leak or change in water use. Some common causes of high-water bills include:

- A leaking toilet, or a toilet that continues to run after being flushed (see additional information below)
- A dripping faucet: a faucet drip can waste 20 gallons of water a day or more
- Filling or topping off a swimming pool
- Watering the lawn, new grass, or trees; also check for an open hose bib
- Kids home for summer vacations or school holidays; guests
- Water-cooled air conditioners
- A broken water pipe or obvious leak; check the pipes in the basement or crawlspace; the water heater could also be leaking
- Water softener problems - cycles continuously
- Running the water to avoid freezing water pipes during cold weather

Generally, water consumption is higher during the summer due to watering of lawns, pools, and gardening. Typically, excluding outdoor uses, an average household uses less than 5,000 gallons of water a month. Here are a few things to check if you get a bill that is higher than usual.

Changes in your water use

Did you have house guests, water your lawn more than usual, or do anything else out of the ordinary in the last month that uses a lot of water? If so, this may account for an increase in your water bill.

Check for leaks

Leaks, whether unseen or unfixed, can waste hundreds and even thousands of gallons of water. It is important to routinely check your plumbing and home for leaky faucets, toilets, and outside taps and irrigation lines.

Toilet and faucet leaks

The most common cause for a high-water bill is running water from your toilet. A continuously running toilet can waste up to 200 gallons a day. That can double a family's typical water use, so fix toilet leaks as soon as possible. Some leaks are easy to find, such as a dripping faucet or running toilet. You can usually hear a running toilet, but not always.

See the toilet assessment below for help in determining if this is the cause of your high-water bill.

Outdoor and underground leaks

Leaks can also occur in harder to find places, such as under your house or in the service line between your water meter and your home. Check outdoor spigots and crawl spaces, and look for wet spots in your yard, which may indicate a leak.

Do-It-Yourself Toilet Assessment


First check for the most common leak: a deteriorated or defected flush valve (flapper) ball at the bottom of the toilet tank. If it does not make a tight seal, water will leak into the toilet bowl. To check for this:

- Take the lid off of the tank behind the bowl, flush the toilet, then wait for it to fully refill.
- Put a few drops of dye or a colored dye tablet (available at some hardware stores) in the tank.

- Wait at least 20 minutes; longer if you suspect it is a small leak.
- If there is any color in the toilet bowl, there is a leak.

The second most common type of leak has to do with an improperly adjusted or broken fill (ballcock) valve. To check for this, take the lid off of the toilet tank, flush, and see if water is draining into the overflow tubes when the tank is full.

The following table shows the amount of water that can be lost (and billed to your account) for various size leaks.

Leak Size		Gallons Per Day	Gallons Per Month
	A dripping leak consumes:	15 gallons	450 gallons
•	A 1/32 in. leak consumes:	264 gallons	7,920 gallons
•	A 1/16 in. leak consumes:	943 gallons	28,300 gallons
•	A 1/8 in. leak consumes:	3,806 gallons	114,200 gallons
•	A 1/4 in. leak consumes:	15,226 gallons	456,800 gallons
•	A 1/2 in. leak consumes:	60,900 gallons	1,827,000 gallons

Irrigation Systems

During the summer, irrigation systems are a common source of high-water use. Automated irrigation systems should be checked regularly to be sure they are functioning properly and have no leaks or broken sprinkler heads. If a sprinkler valve sticks on, it could waste a large quantity of water. The irrigation timer may not be programmed properly, i.e., sprinklers are watering too often and/or for too long. Reprogramming may be necessary if the power has been off.

Water Softeners

Customers with water softeners have higher water bills due to the regeneration or backwash cycles their systems go through. The systems are preset to regenerate or backwash on a regular basis. There are times when these systems will get stuck in a cycle which will cause higher water use.

What Can I Do if My Bill is Unusually High?

If you receive a bill that you feel is too high, check over the common causes listed above. This may help to pinpoint the source of the high bill. If you feel that your bill is too high, please feel free to contact the office. In turn, our operations staff will schedule a time to meet on-site with you to recheck the meter reading concurrently with using the meters built-in leak detection technology to check for leaks. If the meter reading is checked and found to be inaccurate, we will revise the bill accordingly. If the meter detects a leak in your system, you may need to contact a plumber or other professional to help determine the source of the leak. Property owners are responsible for all private service water lines from their meter pit to the residence and for leaks inside the home.