



UP THE CREEK

October 1, 2016

Meter Follies

It's time again to debunk some of the durable misconceptions about water meters, and their use and abuse within your beloved Association. On every water system, including ours, legends arise and thrive, requiring periodic fits of righteousness on our part. This is one of those.

Myth: USCDWUA doesn't read water meters in the winter. But then, after the first reading in March, your whole over-winter usage is totaled up and you are billed accordingly.

Fact: Even some people who actually read their bills believe this myth. It's true that meters aren't read from November (sometimes October) through February. Everybody is billed the minimum base rate in those months.

Myth: As meters age, they speed up, increasing your water bill.

Fact: It's just the opposite. A water meter is a mechanical device with moving parts that wear out. Increased clearance in the guts of the meter allows water to proceed through without being measured. Meters that meet the standards of the American Water Works Association (AWWA) are typically accurate to within plus or minus 1½ percent when brand new. With time, they get slower and jerkier, just like us people.

Myth: It's no good arguing over a high water bill. The company will just tell you that “meters don't lie, so pay up.”

Fact: Actually, we know that meters do lie – they allow some water to escape unbilled. But if you have an unexpected whopper of a bill, you'll find we're not totally inflexible. We will generally make allowance for a leak, provided it hasn't been ignored for months. We will double check the meter reading and look for possible human error at our end. And we can be sympathetic to interesting explanations, such as, “my husband turned on the hose and then went on a ten day drunk.” It depends on how imaginative you are.


Myth: It's okay to mangle a meter lid with a snowplow/power mower/cement truck. The water company will replace it. Stuff happens, right?

Fact: Yes, but stuff is not free. If a water company employee sideswiped the corner of your house with a backhoe, would you overlook that? Please have a care about your water meter. It is, after all, your water supply down there. We're lenient about accidents, it's true, but repeat offenders may find out what a new meter lid costs. It's more than you might think. By the way, keep that lid closed.

Myth: Arranging pebbles on your meter lid in a special pattern is a good way to catch when your meter has been read.

Fact: Maybe, but our bored meter readers sneak out at random times during the month and dump those pebbles off, so you never know. The date we claim to have read your meter is printed on your monthly bill. Proving otherwise with pebbles can be a problem.

Myth: It's never the same number of days between meter readings. That causes high water bills.

Fact: Half true. It's seldom the same number of days between readings, but it can only drive your bill downwards due to a short month, not upwards in a long month. If you must know when we read it, try the  pebble trick.

Myth: Air in the water lines makes a meter run faster, increasing your water bill.

Fact: Of course, that's why air is routinely injected at the treatment plant. Any questions?