

# ADVANCED METERING INFRASTRUCTURE (AMI)

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## I have heard that people's electricity bills went up recently. Is this true?

In some instances, yes. This could be because of a few different reasons:

### Weather

When our winter temperatures drop below 40 degrees or our summer temperatures exceed 100 degrees, there is no doubt that your electricity usage will be impacted. With this in mind, you will notice how your bill fluctuates throughout the year. Only a few days of extreme temperatures can increase your usage and cause your bill to be noticeably higher. The annual usage for our residential customers varies year to year, primarily based on our weather.

When temperatures drop, furnaces work longer using more electricity. People also spend more time at home due to weather which increases usage in lighting, electronics, appliances and heating water, especially over the holiday season or when school is cancelled or delayed.

In addition to weather, the length of daylight time, number of weekends during the billing cycle, energy efficiency measures, and added members to the household all add to the ups and downs of your usage.

### Degree Days – another way to track weather impact:

For a more exact look at how temperature affects customers' bills, utilities track "Degree Days." "Degree days" are the difference between the actual average temperature for that day and 65° F. If it is warmer than 65°, "cooling" degree days will result. If it is cooler than 65°, "heating" degree days will result.

Each degree over or under 65° is considered a degree day. For example, if the average temperature on April 1 was 55° degrees, you subtract 55 from 65 to get 10 so that day had 10 heating degree days. By adding the degree days for all the days in a month, it provides a way to compare the months to see how much colder or warmer each month was. In the months with a larger number of heating degree days (or cooling degree days), customers will likely have a higher bill. During December of 2022, heating degree days were the highest we've seen in four years, 18% higher than the four year average. As you review your bills make sure to watch heating and cooling degree days as well as total usage.

### Old vs. New Technology:

In rare cases, the old, mechanical meter may have been running slower than it should and therefore was giving artificially low usage readings. The new meters use electronics to measure usage and this resulted in a small number of customers having higher bills despite no change in their behavior, a direct result of more accurate metering. With no moving parts to wear down, the new meters will provide more accurate readings for a longer period of time. With the new AMI meters, all residents are more fairly billed for the actual amount of electricity used than may have happened during the era when electro-mechanical meters were read manually.

### Bill Estimating

Bills may be estimated for a variety of factors. Some of those factors include:

- Weather. When temperatures are freezing, water meter boxes can become frozen and difficult to open.
- Data implementation errors. The AMI implementation is a complex project which depends on technology. We have recently identified technology-related issues which have resulted in estimations being performed. Those estimations are based on the usage from the previous year, which depending on weather patterns that year, may result in a significant difference in usage.

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- Skipped meter reads result in consumption estimations. Prior to AMI, reads were conducted manually and required a physical visit to the meter. The AMI process eliminates the need for a physical read, however as the new meters are still being installed, there is a need to manually read an increasingly smaller number of meters. Staffing issues, scheduling, and obsolete equipment have led to an increase in skipped reads. We are currently evaluating processes and staffing levels to ensure skipped reads are prioritized and read in a subsequent billing cycle.
- When consecutive estimated reads occur, it can result in a larger reconciliation between the estimates and actual reads, resulting in a higher or lower than-normal bill.
- The meter replacement process has taken longer than anticipated due to labor shortages, supply chain issues, and weather.

### What is the City doing to address implementation and billing issues?

The City has conveyed a specialized project team made up of staff from Energy Services, Water, Customer Service, and Finance. The team's sole focus is resolving implementation and billing issues through process evaluation, technology, and proactive customer communication. The City is in the process of contacting affected customers. The project team is meeting daily and providing updates to the City Manager and City Council. We will be providing updates on the City's Facebook page and on the City's website in addition to notifying affected customers.

The City has paused meter installations for approximately two weeks to identify solutions to bill estimating, a meter firmware update, and process improvements. We anticipate resuming installations in the near future.

### Why is customer service recommending the Equalized Payment Program?

Equalized Payment Plan is a service that allows the customer to have a uniform billing amount based on the average usage and charges for their service address. This is an average of the previous twelve months of utility charges based on the specific service location and services. Equalized payment plans are reconciled every six months.

### How are my bill due dates determined?

Bills are due 20 days from their date of issuance (bill date). Customers can set up a preferred due date so their bills are due on the same calendar date each month. This due date is determined by their billing cycle, to set up a preferred due date, please contact Customer Service.

### What should I do if I have a question about my bill?

Please contact our Customer Service Representatives at (509) 942-1104 or [CustomerService@ci.richland.wa.us](mailto:CustomerService@ci.richland.wa.us) if you have a billing concern. We recognize there have been longer than normal wait times, and are working to supplement our staffing to shorten those times. We offer a callback feature that allows you to hold your place in line while waiting for a callback. Customer Service representatives are also available Monday - Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on the first floor of City Hall located at 625 Swift Blvd. While all options are available, email allows us to research your account and contact you with accurate information and address your concerns.