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Automatic Meter Reading and Meter Replacement Program Frequently Asked Questions

The City of Salem will initiate its long awaited automated meter replacement program in January 2011. Most of the City's current meters are close to 20 years old and the readings are collected via an outdated, labor-intensive, touchpad system. The new automated meter reading program will install new, more accurate meters that can be read via radio frequencies that send consumption data directly to the City Water Department for billing. This system also has the capability of providing leak detection both within the city's water distribution system and within individual homes and businesses.

The City has hired Easton Win Water Services (EWS), of Brockton, Massachusetts, to install the new Neptune water meters and associated radio transmitters provided by Ti-Sales, Inc. of Sudbury, Massachusetts. The new system will ensure the City is measuring water consumption accurately and fairly for billing purposes, and will continue to promote water conservation. This also enables the City to comply with all applicable industry standards for water metering and billing.

What is an AMR Project?

The AMR Project really means Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) and Meter Replacement Program. This two year city wide project will replace old meters with new, state of the art meters that will allow the City of Salem to obtain meter readings without coming to your home. This means you will be billed from actual meter readings.

Where is my water meter?

Your water meter is most likely located in your basement or crawl space, usually along the front wall of your house, where your water service enters from the street.

Why do I need a new meter?

The majority of existing meters in Salem are close to 20 years old and many cannot be read accurately. The new meters will transmit the water meter readings directly to the Water Billing Department and accurately report your consumption daily. This will provide more accurate usage and fair billing.

When will my meter get replaced?

You will be notified by a letter from EWS, please make your appointment by calling, **EWS toll-free at 1-866-983-8080 Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or log on to www.winwaterservices.com, click on the appointment scheduler tab under Salem and schedule an appointment online.** Appointments are scheduled Monday through Saturday beginning at 7:30 a.m. *In order to minimize water billing issues, it is important that you schedule your appointment within two weeks.*

How does the new meter reading system work?

The meter readings will be sent daily from a transmitter at your home via several data collection units located throughout the City. A server, located in the City Hall Annex at 120 Washington Street, will collect all readings in the City. These readings will be used for your actual billing, whether it's monthly or quarterly.

Will anything else need to be installed?

In addition to the new water meter, a gray radio transmitter, which will send your meter's consumption data to the Water Department, will be placed on the outside of your home (typically in the same location as the current touch pads). New wiring between the meter and the transmitter will be installed as well.

Will my water bill go up?

Older meters tend to run slower and therefore do not measure all the water going through them. The new water meter will accurately measure the water that you use. All new meters are tested at the factory to ensure that they register properly. If you see a higher bill, it is usually not because your new meter is reading too high; it is because the old meter was running slow. The City will not back bill customers because their old meter was running slow, but all customers with new meters will now pay for their actual usage.

Will the timing of my water bills change?

There will be no change to your quarterly billing period; however you will have more accurate bills.

How do I know that you have my reading and not someone else's?

Each radio frequency device has a unique identification number, which is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique identification number is compared to your account record to ensure that there is a match.

How do you know that my reading is accurate?

These state of the art water meters have electronic registers, which verifies the meter reading three times before it is sent to the transmitting unit. This reading is deemed more accurate than visually reading the meter.

How do I know if higher usage may be a result of a leak in my plumbing system?

A new, more accurate meter may detect small leaks that the older meter missed, including continuous flow recordings late at night, between the hours of 2 and 5am, when water usage is typically non-existent. Check faucets for small drips. Also check your toilet tank for small leaks in the toilet bowl. Place a few drops of food coloring in your toilet tank. If the water in the bowl changes to the color of dye used in the tank, you have a leak. Seek assistance from a plumbing professional to fix all such leaks.

Do I have to be home for the process?

Yes, someone over the age of 18 must be home, to allow the installers access to the existing meter.

How long will the meter installation take?

Under normal circumstances, the installation will take about 30 minutes. The water will have to be turned off until the meter is changed. Please be advised that there may be some trapped air or slight discoloration in the water line that result from the change out. This will clear up after running your water for a few moments. You may hear some noise as the air exits spigots and fixtures. This is normal.

What will they do inside my house?

Generally the installer will locate your water meter, remove the old meter, install the new meter and run wire along a wall or foundation to a point outside your home or business. They will then attach the transmitting unit on the outside, and clean up the area.

Is there a hazard from the radio transmitter in my home?

No, the radio signal is only on when the meter reading takes place. This is less than a few seconds per month and typically takes place at night. The power level is far below that where any risk occurs.

Is there anything hazardous inside the equipment?

No, only ordinary electronics and batteries are inside the equipment.

Will the radio interfere with my television, cordless phone or pacemaker?

No, the radio transmissions occur on a licensed frequency dedicated to the Water Department which is very different from those used by television signals, cordless phones and pacemakers. In addition, the transmissions last less than a few seconds each month. You will never see interference with your television reception.

How will I know your installer works for you?

All installers will be EWS employees and they will arrive at your home or business in clearly identified vehicles and wear EWS company shirts and have city photo ID badges, indicating they are authorized to do this work by the City.

Who should I call if would like more information about the AMR Project itself?

You may call the City of Salem Engineering Department at 978-619-5679.

Why are we going to a new system?

To provide a more accurate recording of water consumption and a more cost effective way of transmitting that consumption data to the Water Department. In addition, this program will improve the City's water infrastructure and increase our ability to respond to customer inquiries.

This program is also a continuation of the City's effort to go green as meter readers will no longer need to visit each meter to get consumption data, leaks in the water system or in individual homes or businesses will be identified very quickly, and overall billing will become more accurate.

How do I prepare for the installation?

By removing anything close to your water meter and reading device.

What happens if I refuse to have my meter replaced?

The City will shut off your water.

What about plumbing from the meter to my house?

In rare cases, EWS may find that some plumbing repairs will be required prior to meter installation. The customer is responsible for the water service on their property (typically from the shut-off valve in the back of the sidewalk, up to, and including, the plumbing inside the building). If defective plumbing or deteriorated pipes prevent the meter replacement, the customer will be required to hire a licensed plumber and make the necessary repairs.