

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE UTILITY

GENERAL QUESTIONS

WHY IS THE CITY OF THOMPSON CHARGING FOR WATER NOW? DID VALE STOP PAYING?

Vale continues to provide the City with drinking water free of charge. The City of Thompson is responsible for the entire underground infrastructure as well as the treatment of the sewage. The cost for maintaining, not replacing, the cities portion was previously included in the taxes however, capital projects, such as water main replacement had to compete for dollars with other capital project. The utility provides dollars which can only be spent on the utility operating and capital.

I HEARD NOT EVERYONE HAS A METER,

We are aware of a few properties without meters, some are vacant and the water is shut off, others are billed double the average invoice.

While we have made every attempt to ensure that we have not missed anyone as there are over 4000 accounts, if you are aware of someone who does not have a meter please let us know or tell them to contact us. There is no benefit to not telling us, we will bill them back to January of 2011.

I HEARD THAT YOU CAN NOT BILL US BECAUSE NOT EVERYONE HAS A METER.

City of Thompson By-Law 1842-2010, section 35 states, " For locations where in the opinion of the Director water meters cannot be installed, or for whatever reason are not metered, water rates will apply as if a meter were installed, and an alternative method of estimating water consumption for calculation of the water commodity charge will be applied, as determined."

NO ONE HAS EVER COME TO READ MY METER. HOW DOES THE CITY GET THE READINGS?

The City does not need to enter your home unless there is an issue with your meter. All of the meters are radio frequency and can be read from the road.

WHY IS MY BILL SO MUCH HIGHER THAN MY NEIGHBOURS, THERE ARE ONLY 2 OF US AND 5 OF THEM.

There are many reasons for this your neighbour may have all high efficiency appliances and low flow taps and toilets. One or more of them may shower at work. You may have a continuous leak or an intermittent leak. .

Did you know that you can check your meter for leaks? Shine a flashlight on it and look for a little tap: flashing means it is intermittent (usually the sticky toilet handles). If it is solid (not flashing) you have a continuous leak. To check your toilet, add food coloring to the tank, let it sit 20 minutes. If the color shows up in your toilet bowl you have a leak.

I WANT TO VERIFY THE READING ON MY INVOICE IS CORRECT BUT THE SCREEN ON MY METER IS BLANK. IS MY METER NOT WORKING?

No your meter is working fine. Shine a flashlight on your meter the reading will become visible.

I DO NOT LIKE THE LOCATION OF MY METER AND WANT TO MOVE IT. CAN I?

The meters were placed where they are for specific reasons. They cannot be moved without the authorization from the City of Thompson and can only be moved or replaced by a licensed plumber.

WHO DOES THE WATER METER BELONG TO?

The water meter belongs to the City of Thompson and if removed, due to demolition or damage, must be returned to the City of Thompson. Any meters not returned will be charged to the property owner.

INVOICE QUESTIONS

I HEARD PEOPLE ARE GETTING INVOICES FOR LESS THAN THE FLAT FEE OF 81.51

This can happen for a couple of reasons;

- 1) An overpayment on a previous invoice, the credit will reduce the amount owing.
- 2) There was a move in or out during the quarter, the invoice is then pro-rated to cover only the days they were in the property.

I KNOW PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT GETTING INVOICES.

There are several reasons someone may not get an invoice:

- 1) The person lives in an apartment building. In this instance there is one meter per building and the bill goes to the property owner and not the tenants.
- 2) Some property owners have chosen to have the bills come directly to them and not the tenant.
- 3) If we are not informed that a tenant moved in or out the invoice may be going to the wrong person. It is important to advise us when you are moving so we can do a final reading and bill you on your actual meter readings.
- 4) Alternate arrangements were made and someone else was paying the invoice

If you or someone you know is not receiving their utility invoice have them call the Utility Department. It is better to call right away than receive your invoices a year later.

I HAD RECEIVED AN INVOICE FOR \$2500. WHEN I CALLED THE CITY REDUCED IT TO 150.00. HOW CAN YOU MAKE SUCH A MISTAKE?

You are running a bleeder and the \$2500.00 invoice was not a mistake on the part of the City. The invoice you received shows your actual consumption. We try and apply the rebate before we send out the invoices but on occasion we will send the invoice out without the rebate because

- 1) You need to be aware of how much water you are using. It only takes a trickle to keep your lines from freezing. A trickle is not \$2500.00 worth of water, it is about \$400.00. If we apply the rebate ahead of time it appears you are only using \$150.00 worth of water.
- 2) Sometimes we run out of time. We have about three weeks from the time the readings are imported to the mailing of the invoices.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I DO NOT AGREE WITH MY INVOICE?

Contact the Utility department. We can check our reports to see if there is an issue with your meter. We can also do data logging to verify there is not an issue. There is a fee for of 250.00 for the first hour for City employees to attend your home to test your meter. We do not want to charge you unnecessarily so we will ask you to check your taps, toilets and verify the meter and serial number before we go to your house. We can also send your meter out for calibration, if the meter is working correctly you will be responsible for all costs including the plumber, shipping and testing.

WHAT IS THE CITY GOING TO DO IF I DO NOT PAY MY BILL?

Outstanding Utility invoices can be transferred to your tax account.

HOW DOES THE CITY HAVE THE RIGHT TO TRANSFER MY UTILITY TO TAXES?

The Municipal Act of Manitoba gives municipalities powers. City of Thompson By-law 1855-2011 section 11 states“ Pursuant to Section 252(2) of The Municipal Act, the amount of all outstanding charges for water and wastewater service are a lien and charge upon the land serviced, and shall be collected in the same manner in which ordinary taxes upon the land are collectible, and with like remedies.”

WHAT DOES LIKE REMEDIES MEAN?

This means that if you do not pay, once transferred to taxes , your property could be sold in TAX SALE.

RENTAL PROPERTY QUESTIONS

WHY DOES THE CITY NOT GO AFTER THE TENANT FOR OUTSTANDING BILLS?

Rental properties are a business, the City of Thompson makes every attempt to collect from your tenants however, as a municipality, and the City’s first responsibility is to the citizens of Thompson whom the burden would ultimately be passed onto. Therefore, the City assumes no risk for unpaid accounts for your business. As a landlord you can protect yourself by contacting the City to find out if the accounts are being paid. The City can also send you a copy of the quarterly invoices.

A TENANT CAN TELL THE CITY THEY OWN THE PROPERTY AND THE LANDLORD WILL NOT KNOW THE TENANT HAS AN OUTSTANDING ACCOUNT

Landlords should be advising the City of all rental properties. If we are aware that the property is a rental property we can send a copy of the invoice directly to you.

CAN PREVIOUS TENANTS OUTSTANDING ACCOUNT BE TRANSFERRED TO THE NEXT TENANT?

No, the City cannot transfer the previous tenant's outstanding account to the next tenant.

WHY DO ONLY SOME TENANTS IN TOWNHOUSES RECEIVE A BILL?

Some of the townhouse owners have chosen to pay the bill directly. All townhouses are metered.

METER QUESTIONS

I HEARD THERE ARE LOTS OF METERS WHICH HAVE FAILED.

We are having issues with some meters. We believe that a part of the cause is the many water breaks our community experiences. We are currently working with the manufacturer of the meter to confirm this to be the issue. The meters we suspect have been affected are showing zero consumption.

I RECEIVED A NOTE SAYING MY METER IS NOT WORKING WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT CALL?

It is important to call right away so we can discuss the issue and figure out what to do next. We receive three reports when we import the meter readings. They advise us if you have;

- 1) a continuous leak
- 2) zero consumption- this will happen if you are away or your meter is not working
- 3) no reading- indicates we were unable to get a reading – there may be something interfering with our equipment or an issue with your meter.

If you do not contact the City we will have to estimate your bill.

WHAT IS DATALOGGING?

Datalogging is one of the tools we use to find out if there are any issues with your meter. Staff of the City will need to have access to your meter. We shine a special flashlight on your meter which tells the meter to communicate with our equipment. The process takes about 5 minutes. We then go back to the City and download the information into our software and provide you with a graph. The graph will identify daily consumption, if you have been away, if you have or had an intermittent or continuous leak for the last 90 days.

HOW DOES THE CITY KNOW I HAVE A LEAK?

When we drive through the city collecting all of the readings your meter and our equipment communicate. Your meter will send information back regarding continuous leaks. It will advise us if you have had a leak in intervals from 1-2 days up to 35 + days. Unfortunately, the report does not give us specific dates of when the leak started or if the leak has been fixed, because of this we will put a note on your invoice even if the report showed you had a leak for one day.

Readings are done every quarter (90 days) and we are only notified if there is water running continuously. We are not notified of leaks which occur intermittently, such as a leaking tap. The City of Thompson does not provide adjustments due to leaks; it is in the homeowner's best interest to check your taps and toilets regularly to minimize water consumption when a leak does occur.

I HAD A LEAK AND IT HAS BEEN FIXED CAN I GET A REDUCTION ON MY INVOICE?

The City of Thompson does not provide any rebate for leaks. The utility is new to us so we contacted several communities to ask what their policy was regarding leaks. All of the communities contacted said they do not provide a rebate if there was a leak. They said that it is too difficult to decide who should receive one and who should not and in order to be fair and equitable to everyone they do not reduce the invoice.

It is the homeowner's responsibility to ensure that they do not have any leaks and to ensure that they have winterized their property so pipes do not break. We suggest checking your taps and toilets regularly. You can check your meter for leaks. Shine a flashlight on it and look at the screen. A dripping tap in the top left-hand corner indicates a leak.

I KNOW PEOPLE WHO HAVE BY-PASSED THE METER, WHAT IS THE CITY DOING?

If you know of someone who has by-passed the meter it is your responsibility to contact the City so we can check into it. They are not only "sticking" it to the City but to all of the Citizens of the City of Thompson who end up covering the cost.

We also get reports advising us if there is zero consumption and no reads. We do go through the lists quarterly and send out notes to these people to call us. If they fail to call we estimate the invoice. Estimated invoices get higher the longer it takes for them to call.

WILL THE CITY BE CHECKING ALL OF THE METERS TO VERIFY THEY ARE WORKING?

No we cannot physically check all 4000 meters. We do have reports which identify if there is no consumption or no reading. We will add a note to your invoice advising of an issue and to call us for repair.

MY METER IS NOT WORKING AND THE CITY IS COMING TO REPLACE IT WILL I BE CHARGED?

If your meter malfunctions the City of Thompson will replace it at no cost to the homeowner. If the meter is damaged due to negligence, fire, freezing, or flood the homeowner is responsible for replacing the meter.

BLEEDER REBATE QUESTIONS

I AM RUNNING A BLEEDER. WHY DO YOU STILL PUT A NOTE ON MY INVOICE SAYING I HAVE A LEAK?

We do not want to assume that you are running your bleeder. We put it there so if you are not running a bleeder you are getting the same notice as everyone else. We have had a couple of instances where

the property was running the bleeder and because we put the note on the bill they checked for leaks anyway and leaks were found on these properties.

WHY DO I NOT QUALIFY FOR THE BLEEDER REBATE?

The bleeder rebate is available to properties in known areas, such as the Burntwood Trailer court where the lines are not as deep as those in a home. In most houses the freezing occurs when homeowners are away and do not have someone watching the property or the property is not properly insulated. To ensure your lines do not freeze while you are away have someone stay at your home, or have them check your home daily. If the lines in your house are freezing add insulation to those lines.

I HAVE APPLIED FOR THE BLEEDER REBATE, WHY IS MY BILL OVER \$1000?

We try to apply the bleeder rebate prior to the invoice going out, in some instances we do not have the time and the invoice goes out without the rebate. There is nothing wrong with the invoice that is the actual amount of water you have used. If the City did not have a bleeder rebate that is what you would be expected to pay.

Sending the invoices out without applying the rebate gives you an accurate idea of how much water you have used. We have had an instance where a property owner was horrified to learn they were flushing \$2500.00 of water per quarter down the drain. They have since reduced their invoice to 400.00 per quarter. You only need a trickle to keep your lines from freezing.