
City of Temple
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TO: The City of Temple's Water and Sewer Customers

RE: Problems, Questions, and Promises with Your Water and Sewer Bills

All of us know there have been a number of problems in the past, as well at the present time, concerning the water and sewer bills many of you have received. The amount of your bill and the identification of some charges have caused many of you to have questions. I and my staff apologize for the various problems you may have had to deal with recently and perhaps over the past several months.

I know you don't want to hear excuses or even explanations about what you believe to be errors in your bill from the City of Temple. I know you just want your bill each month to be easy to read, and for you to feel confident in the figures showing how much water your family used. I realize that you are looking for a bill that is consistent from month to month, especially when you are pretty sure your water usage has been consistent from month to month. And I think those are reasonable expectations.

Over the past several months, the City of Temple has been making some changes. Most of these now are in place. From now on, there should be more consistency in your water and sewer bill.

I'm know some of you have contacted City Hall concerning your current bill, and I can assure you that Utility Billing Clerk Pam Edwards has been working hard to get billing problems worked out. I know some of you have worked with Ms. Edwards and together you have dealt with questions and problems.

I hope you will take a minute to read the four points set forth on the other side of this sheet of paper. After you read these points, please contact Ms. Edwards or me at City Hall if you still have some questions. Our promise is to continue to work to get things running smoothly, and then to have a water and sewer system operating effectively so you can have confidence in what your bill says each month.

Sincerely,

William D. Osborne, City Administrator

Attachment

cc: Mayor and City Councilmembers, Billing Clerk Pam Edwards

FOUR OF THE MOST FREQUENT ISSUES WITH CITY'S WATER AND SEWER CUSTOMERS

PROBLEMS WITH PREPARING YOUR BILLS. In recent years the City of Temple government and the citizens of Temple have had to deal with computation problems in the water and sewer bills. The basic problem was with the software company that had responsibility for calculating and mailing the monthly bills made far too many errors. That company's billing system was old and had not changed to the new technology. The City of Temple decided last spring to contract with the same company used by the City of Villa Rica in order to eliminate "bill preparation" problems as much as possible, and also to realize a cost savings by having this work done through an intergovernmental agreement with our neighboring city. The problems of the past and the problems of transition to the new system for bill preparation now should largely be behind us.

WATER AND SEWER BASE RATES. The new format of the Water and Sewer bill you now receive was confusing to some people, because there appeared to be a new separate charge called a "water base" and a new separate charge called a "sewer base." Actually, your monthly bill already included a "base charge" for water and sewer, but it was included in the total charge for "water" and for "sewer" and not shown separately. Certainly, this was confusing. We apologize for not explaining this on the bill itself, since in the past the "base charge" and the "usage charge" had been added together. The fact is: There has been no increase in "water and sewer rates" during calendar 2017.

FOLLOWING A REGULAR SCHEDULE FOR READING METERS. The City Public Works Department has a very small group of employees working in the field. Reading meters is very important, but so are such things as dealing with water line breaks, dealing with street repairs, cleaning up debris on streets. As we know, emergencies must be dealt with. We have 17 different routes for reading meters, and a top priority in this department now and for the future will be to make sure each route is read on the same week in each month. This will help to ensure a consistency. We know that when a route is read at different times of the month, a person's bill for one month could cover about six weeks and then the next month might cover only three weeks. This results in the monthly billing cycle being inconsistent, and it results in people believing the meter readings are inaccurate. Our commitment is to read each route during the same week each month, so your monthly bill actually will be for a month of service.

AGING WATER METERS. All of us know how household furniture, equipment, and other things get scratched up and banged up as the result of use. Just think how much worse it is when the equipment is outside in a hole in the ground where ground water, dirt, and leaves will collect. That's the environment for water meters. Of our almost 1,900 water meters, only about 200 are new enough to be able to be read "remotely" from the service truck using modern computer equipment. The rest must be read manually, which means clearing out debris and trying to see the numbers through the scratched-up dirty protective plate on the meter. And despite the workers' best efforts, sometimes errors are made in reading the meter. We have put a new emphasis with our workers, to double-check the readings for accuracy. Also, we are working on plans to replace these old meters. That is a high priority, and it is an expensive and a needed improvement to our water and sewer system.