HENRICO WATER
Department of Public Utilities

Questions about your water bill?

Look for Leaks

Conserving our water resources

Henrico County's Department of Public Utilities (DPU) provides water and sewer services to more than 100,000 customers. Because water is a precious resource and clean water is essential to a good quality of life — and because DPU strives to support its customers — Henrico is committed to conserving water and preventing loss. Early detection and prompt repair of water leaks are the best ways to achieve this goal.

Who is responsible?

DPU is responsible for repairing leaks on the street side of the meter box and inside the meter box.

When a customer connects to the public water system, a plumber makes a connection on the house side of the meter box. Leaks at the plumber's connection, the service line to the house and all household plumbing are the customer's responsibility.

Signs of a leak

A higher-than-normal bill with increased water usage could be the first indication of a leak.

Customers may recognize waste or a leak of water during their normal activities, such as a running toilet or dripping faucets. Standing water in the yard or water in or around the meter box also could indicate a leak.

Detecting a leak

The first step is to check your meter. To get an accurate test, ensure that water is not being used in your home. This means that no faucets or showers are running, no toilets are flushing and no dishwashers or washing machines are operating.

Locate the meter box in your yard and remove the lid to access the meter. Open the cover over the meter's dial. There is a leak detector built into the dial that will move whenever water is passing through

the meter. If water is not being used, this detector should not be moving.

The county uses three types of meters

Each has a leak detector. Determine the type of meter you have:

Elster Mechanical Meter:

The white triangle in the middle of the meter is the leak detector. If it is rotating, water is flowing through the meter.

Badger Mechanical Meter:

The blue circle is the leak detector. If it is rotating, water is flowing through the meter.

Badger Digital Meter:

The dripping faucet icon indicates water has been flowing through the meter for 24 hours without a 15-minute interval of no flow.

Reading mechanical meters

For mechanical meters, it may be helpful to turn on a faucet and look at the meter. This will allow you to see the leak indicator in motion. Once the faucet is turned off, the indicator should stop.

However, the leak detector may not be effective if water loss is intermittent — for example, if a toilet tank leaks slowly and refills only when the water drops to a certain level. In this situation, recording meter readings can help.

Find a time when the meter dial should not advance because water is not being used, such as when you are at work or otherwise away from the house. Check the meter before you leave and again when you return. By comparing the two readings, you will be able to determine whether there was water loss while you were away.

If you detect a leak, the next step is to determine if it's inside the house or underground in the line that brings water from the meter. Find the main shutoff valve, which is usually located in a crawl space, garage or

utility room. Closing this valve will stop all water from entering your house. If the meter indicates water use after you have closed the valve, the leak is in the line between the meter and the house.

Leaks within your home

Faucets and toilets are often the source of leaks within the home. A faucet leak is usually due to old or broken interior parts of the valve. Replacement of washers and valves may stop the leak. These parts can be obtained from your local hardware store.

A leaking toilet is the most overlooked and costly type of leak because it may not be obvious. These leaks can be large or small, constant or intermittent, and silent or noisy. A defective flapper, or an improperly adjusted or broken fill valve (ball cock) are the common problems that can be fixed easily with replacement parts.

To determine if your toilet is leaking, remove the tank lid and pour enough cola to discolor the water in the back of the tank. Do not flush. After about 30 minutes, check the toilet bowl to see if any cola has seeped through. If the water is clear, it isn't leaking. If you see cola in the bowl, there is a leak.

In most cases, replacement of the toilet flapper and/ or filling mechanism will stop the leak. These parts are available from your local hardware store and other retailers.

Leaks outside your home

Irrigation systems or water spigots often are the cause of leaks outside your home. Irrigation systems should be checked each spring before use to make sure no damage was caused by frost or freezing. Outside spigots and hose connections also should be checked.

1. Examine portions of your property that are always wet or areas where water is pooling.

2. Look at your driveway, curb or street for signs of water flow. The evidence may not be a steady stream of water; it could be a puddle that never dries, a darker spot as if water has been spilled, or cracking of paved areas, sink holes or potholes.

3. Are you experiencing a notable drop in water pressure or flow?

Finding other leaks

The exact location of a leak may not be obvious. Water leaking from one area may flow along a ledge or channel before appearing as damage or an indication of a leak in another place.

Look for wet, warped or discolored areas on your ceilings, floors, walls and woodwork, such as the bottom of a kitchen or bathroom sink cabinet. When making repairs, find the actual location of the leak, not just the resulting damage.

Condensation may appear as a leak. Although it is normal, excessive amounts can damage walls, ceilings, floors and woodwork. Insulating your pipes may stop or reduce condensation.

Other reasons for high bills

A change in your water-use pattern is the most common reason for increased consumption. Frequent visitors, new appliances, or regular lawn or garden irrigation can affect your bill greatly.

More accurate readings due to a new water meter also may result in a higher bill. Meters may run more slowly as they age, leading to a perception that your water consumption has decreased over time. When older meters are replaced, bills may indicate higher consumption due to the accurate readings of a new meter.