



# Water Service Meters: An Opportunity to Focus on Residential Water Use

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Washington's Water Use Efficiency Rule set a maximum allowable distribution system leakage at 10 percent for water systems with 15 or more residential service connections. The best way to know whether you meet the water loss standard is to collect and measure data from your source and service meters. To that end, the rule required systems to install source meters by January 2007, and service meters by January 22, 2017. Only mobile home parks, RV parks, and campgrounds are exempt from installing a meter at every service connection.

## Why do water systems need meters?

Meters provide instantaneous, hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual variations that tell the story of efficient versus inefficient water use. This helps water managers understand where and how to invest in their water system, thereby ensuring a safe and reliable supply of water for their customers. You simply cannot manage what you cannot measure.

Understanding how much water each homeowner uses per month can help you manage water supplies especially during drought or another emergency. For example, one homeowner that's using 25 percent of the community's total water may be placing more stress on the water system and jeopardizing the water supply for everyone, or it may have a service line leak.

## Who is responsible for compliance? Water systems or homeowners?

Water systems, not individual homeowners, must comply with the law. We will review compliance with the metering deadline sometime in 2017, and notify any water system not completely metered that it is out of compliance with the requirement. We may work with the system to identify a reasonable installation schedule through a bilateral compliance agreement.

## What if a homeowner won't allow us to install a water meter?

Homeowners unwilling to install meters at their residences place the entire water system in a difficult position of noncompliance. Therefore, you should tell homeowners about the benefits they may get from meters. For example, meters will tell them how much water they use so they can manage their water use. Meters will protect their property by allowing them, or a water operator, to detect a leak or a broken water line before it causes damage. Homeowners that use less water may pay less when they go from a flat rate to a rate based on actual use.

## What kind of information do meters provide?

Unless you have source meters and service connection meters there is no effective way to measure water loss, customer consumption, or unauthorized use.

**Source meters measure total production.** That is all metered water that enters the distribution system through an intertie, from a water source, or the treatment plant for the year.

**Service meters measure authorized consumption.** That is all metered water from each service connection and unmetered authorized uses for the year.

## How much will the meters cost?

When we adopted the rule in 2007, we predicted that each service meter installation would cost \$800 if financed for 15 years at 6 percent interest (\$87 a year or \$7.25 a month). With inflation, most water systems today report paying \$800 to \$1,200 per connection for labor and materials.

## Should we change our rates after meter installation?

The state does not dictate the water rates. You can view meter installation as a source of revenue if you base your rates on actual consumption (the more water a homeowner uses, the more they pay). It's up to the water system owner or manager to determine how they want to use the meters as a way to pay for needed improvements, maintenance or operation of the water system.

## What kind of financial assistance is available?

Very low-income homeowners may be able to borrow the cost of materials and labor needed to install a meter from USDA Rural Development at 1 percent interest. To find out whether a homeowner meets the minimum qualification criteria, see the [USDA Rural Development Funds \(PDF\)](#).

## For More Information

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