



Common Causes For High Utility Bills



An unusually high water bill is most often caused by a leak or change in water use. Some common causes of high water bills include:

- A leaking toilet, or a toilet that continues to run after being flushed (*see additional information below*)
- A dripping faucet; a faucet drip can waste 20 gallons of water a day or more
- Filling or topping off a swimming pool or hot tub
- Watering the lawn, new grass, or trees; also check for an open hose spigots
- Humidifiers attached to the furnace that are improperly adjusted or not working correctly
- Sump pumps that have water powered back up
- Kids home for summer vacations or school holidays; guests
- Water-cooled air conditioners
- A broken water pipe or obvious leak; check the pipes in the basement or crawlspace; the water heater could also be leaking
- Water softener problems – cycles continuously
- Running the water to avoid freezing water pipes during cold weather

Generally, water consumption is higher during the summer due to watering of lawns, pools, and gardening. Typically, a family of four uses 4-5,000 gallons of water per month, or 160–200 gallons for one day. The largest water users are the toilets, clothes washer and showers, accounting for about two-thirds of the water used in an average household.

Things to check if you get a bill that's higher than usual:

Changes in your water use

Did you have house guests, water your lawn more than usual, or do anything else out of the ordinary? If so, this may account for an increase in your water bill.

Check for leaks

Leaks, whether unseen or unfixed, can waste hundreds and even thousands of gallons of water. It is important to routinely check your plumbing and home for leaky faucets, toilets, and outside taps and irrigation lines.

Outdoor and underground leaks

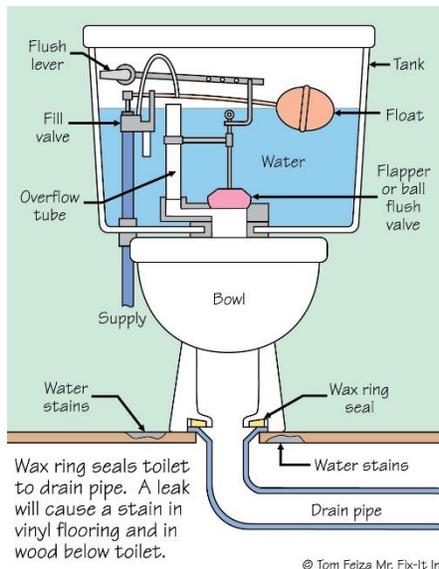
Leaks can also occur in harder to find places, such as under your home, crawl spaces. Also, check outdoor spigots and irrigation systems, and look for wet spots in your yard, which may indicate a leak.

Toilet and faucet leaks

The most common cause for a high water bill is running water from your toilet. A continuously running toilet can waste up to 200 gallons a day or more depending on the volume flow down the drain. This can double a family's typical water use, so fix toilet leaks as soon as possible. Some leaks are easy to find, such as a dripping faucet or running toilet. You can usually hear a running toilet, but not always.

Do-it-yourself Toilet Assessment

First check for the most common leak: a deteriorated or defected flush valve (flapper) ball at the bottom of the toilet tank. If it does not make a tight seal water will leak into the toilet bowl. To check for a leaky toilet follow steps 1 thru 4:



- Take the lid off of the tank behind the bowl, flush the toilet, and then wait for it to fully refill.
- Put a few drops of dye or a colored dye tablet (food coloring works well) in the tank.
- Wait at least 20 minutes; longer if you suspect it is a small leak.
- If there is any color in the toilet bowl, there is a leak.

The second most common type of leak has to do with an improperly adjusted or broken fill (ballcock) valve. To check for this take the lid off of the toilet tank, flush, and see if water is draining into the overflow tubes when the tank is full.

The following table shows the amount of water that can be lost for various size leaks.

Leak	Gallons Per Day	Gallons Per Month
A dripping leak consumes:	15 gallons	450 gallons
A 1/32 inch leak consumes:	264 gallons	7,920 gallons
A 1/16 inch leak consumes:	934 gallons	28,300 gallons
A 1/8 inch leak consumes:	3,806 gallons	114,200 gallons
A 1/4 inch leak consumes:	15,226 gallons	456,800 gallons
A 1/2 inch leak consumes:	60,900 gallons	1,827,000 gallons

Irrigation Systems

During the summer irrigation systems are a common source of high water use. Watering times generally double during the summer months compared to the winter. Automated irrigation systems should be checked regularly to be sure they are functioning properly and have no leaks or broken sprinkler heads. If a sprinkler valve sticks on, it could waste an extremely large quantity of water. The irrigation timer may not be programmed properly; i.e., sprinklers are watering too often and/or for too long. Reprogramming may be necessary if the power has been off.

Water Softeners

Customers with water softeners have higher water bills due to the regeneration or backwash cycles their systems go through. The systems are preset to regenerate or backwash on a regular basis. The systems will use water to clean the filter media and discharge the wastewater into the ground next to the system. There are times when these systems will get stuck in a cycle which will cause higher water use.

What Can I do if My Bill is Unusually High?

If you receive a bill that you feel is too high, check over the common causes listed above. This may help to pinpoint the source of the high bill. You may need to contact a plumber or other professional to help

determine the source of a leak. Property owners are responsible for all private service water lines from the public water main to the residence and for leaks inside the home.