

Excessive Water Use FAQs

Q. How does MetCom determine the expected water usage for a household?

- A. *MetCom utilizes the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) standard of 250 gallons per household per day as a baseline. This number is based on a general rule-of-thumb, where each person should use about 80 - 100 gallons per day of water. MDE uses the latest census data of approximately 2.6 people per household to calculate the average daily use.*

Note: Indoor water use can typically be met using no more than 50 gallons per person per day, with more efficient homes using as little as 25 to 30 gallons per person per day. For a family of four, average indoor use ranges from around 3,000 gallons to 6,000 gallons per month.

Q. Is there any consideration given to family size, yard dimensions for sprinklers, or the number of bathrooms?

- A. *As stated above, the average amount of water per household is MDE's 250 gallons per day. This equates to 7,500 gallons per month. MetCom defines excessive use as 4 times the average use or 30,000 gallons a month. Since home water use also fluctuates seasonally based on the size and type of irrigated landscape, MetCom has established a 10,000 gallon a month threshold for customers with irrigation systems. This threshold allows customers to utilize approximately 40% more water for outdoor irrigation uses such as lawn sprinkling, car washing, pool filling, etc. which typically occurs between May and October.*

Note: Without the installation of an irrigation meter by the customer, MetCom does not have a method to know if a property has an irrigation system or not.

Q. What is a Water Appropriation and Use Permit?

- A. *In order to conserve, protect, and use water resources of the State in the best interests of the people of Maryland, it is necessary to control the appropriation or use of surface and underground waters. State regulations require water users to obtain a Water Appropriation and Use Permit for any activity that withdraws water from the State of Maryland. MetCom has 28 separate water systems that extract water from various aquifers to serve our customers, but the amount of water that can be extracted each year is limited. Permit requests are evaluated to determine whether the amount of water requested is reasonable for the stated purpose, and to ensure that withdrawals do not have unreasonable impacts on the water resource or on neighboring users.*

Note: If these limits are exceeded, MetCom may be penalized or fined.

Q. How can customers track their daily water consumption?

- A. *Meters are read monthly by meter technicians and customers subsequently receive notifications about their past usage on their bills. A customer may request a historical data log to help identify periods or times of high use. At present, MetCom does not*

provide individual meters for customers to monitor their private use of water. However there are devices that may be purchased from third parties which can *monitor water usage on a standard residential water line*. These devices can be installed relatively easily and can help detect leaks and get notified immediately, monitor and manage your water use both indoors and out and break down your water use by individual household appliances and water fixtures.

Note: MetCom is currently working on a capital project that will allow customers to monitor their water usage in “real-time”. This will be a great asset to MetCom and our customers in our mutual conservation efforts by allowing the customer to check their water consumption on a daily or even hourly basis through an on-line customer portal.

Q. Is it possible that the water meter could be defective?

A. Yes, it is possible. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) requires metering and accountability of all water taken into the system and distributed to its customers. Though we cannot say that a high usage reading is not the result of a faulty register, meter accuracy generally averages 99.6%. MetCom also audits water usage annually as a part of the State permitting requirements (see above) and reports the results to MDE. A customer may request their existing meter be tested. In these cases, MetCom will send the “suspect” meter to the manufacturer for testing and temporarily provide a replacement meter for a fee of \$120. If the existing meter was determined to be faulty, the \$120 fee will be waived.

Note: If a customer’s plumber cannot locate the source of a water leak, MetCom will replace the meter register to verify it is not a faulty meter reading. Upon request, MetCom can also temporarily replace an existing register with a new one to determine if a leak is still present.

Q. How can water be restored after it is turned off?

A. If a customer fails to pay their bill, regardless of their payment history, and does not contact MetCom to enter into a payment arrangement, the water supply may be restricted or terminated. *If water service has been terminated, it will not be resumed unless a \$65.00 (\$75.00 with curb stop box) turn-off/turn-on charge plus full account balance is paid with certified funds. If paid after 3 pm, the fee will be \$120 (\$130 with curb stop box) to recover overtime costs, service will be restored same day.*

Note: It is vital that all fixtures are turned to the off position prior to the Meter Technician restoring water service. Failure to do so may cause considerable delay in the restoration of water service. For more information, please see more information under our [Billing FAQs](#).

Q. What happens if I fall behind on my payments?

A. Each year, there are numerous households and businesses that fall behind in their water bills, which unfortunately makes them vulnerable to actions such as the shutting off of their public water supply and possible tax sale (if customers are more than six (6) months in arrears). The Commission hopes that by maintaining affordable usage rates, that we can continue keeping the number of shut-offs each month to a minimum.

However, not every shutoff is due to a customer not being able to afford water. Some shut-offs occur because a property was abandoned or the owners simply forgot to pay. Others are temporary and either at the request of the property owner or required as a part of routine / emergency maintenance efforts.

Q. Are their payment plan options available to customers?

A. Yes, if a customer is notified that their water is scheduled to be turned off, there are payment plan programs available <https://www.metcom.org/payment-options> to provide a remedy for those behind on their bills or are otherwise in financial distress.

Q. Are customers notified of possible excessive use and water disconnection?

A. The Commission tries to provide ample time and opportunity for customers to pay their water bills. The Billing Department uses past-due balance and the billing cycle to determine accounts eligible for water shut-offs and issues a warning which is printed on the customers water bill. If these notifications are not addressed, the Billing Department issues additional guidance to its' customers. Once a disconnection notice is issued on an account, the past-due delinquent balance should be paid in full by the specified turn-off date to avoid disconnection.

Note: Acceptable payment methods include cash, money order, Visa, Master Card or certified check at MetCom's Administrative Office prior to the disconnection date to avoid interruption of service. Unfortunately, personal checks will not be accepted.

Q. Can customers appeal an excessive use fine that is added to a monthly bill?

A. Yes. Pursuant to the Law, Chapter 113-13, <https://www.metcom.org/chapter-113-sanitary-districts> allows MetCom jurisdiction over the water system and does allow for appeals to be processed through the Metropolitan Commission's Board. Requests may be submitted in writing or a Request for Appointment Form is available at <https://www.metcom.org/public-comments>.