

Finding leaks

Have you noticed your water bill amount has been slowly creeping higher the last few quarters? Perhaps you received a letter from SCBWA about increased water usage. SCBWA uses actual water usage amounts for each bill; if your bill is higher, so is your usage.

Occasionally, there may be a legitimate reason your usage is higher. During summer months, usage increases due to watering, filling pools or hot tubs, etc. Sometimes a change in household situations, like a new baby or visitors for a few days or more, can cause extra usage. However, if none of these situations apply to you, and there are no other known reasons for your water usage to increase, you may have a leak somewhere in your property.

First of all, any water usage that SCBWA measures is water that passes through the meter. Most often, this means the water is being drawn inside your residence. However, some customers have a meter that is located in a pit or vault outside the home. If this is the case, possible leaks will be addressed later.

For customers with a meter inside your residence, higher usage is caused by some occurrence in the home. The most common cause of higher usage is a running toilet. Because toilets will continue to cycle water through, a leaky toilet can use hundreds of thousands of gallons in a single quarter. Imagine that your toilet never stopped filling with water. Instead of leaking onto the floor, the toilet then just kept flushing that water back down the drain and calling for more and more water. Sometimes, the sound of this is clearly audible, and you may be able to catch it happening the first few times. However, there can be silent leaks when a toilet doesn't make an audible flushing sound, so the cycling of water goes unnoticed.

The best way to test your toilets to see if this is an issue is to use the dye test where you suspect a leak. To perform the dye test, you just need some food coloring (or if none is available, any dark colored juice, Kool-Aid powder, or strong coffee will also work). Place a few drops of food coloring in the tank, or enough of the other colored items to turn the water in the tank a significantly noticeable shade of color. DO NOT FLUSH. Wait for about 15-20 minutes. If after that time has elapsed, the color from the tank of the toilet has leaked into the bowl, that toilet has a leak. (For more details on this, please see the Dye Test video on our website.) If your toilet does have a leak, that is something that a plumber would need to fix.

Another common cause of high usage is a malfunctioning water softener. Sometimes water softeners can go into a phase that causes them to constantly call for water. The best way to fix this is to switch your water softeners bypass valve on. This will prevent water from cycling through the water softener, as well as the constant drawing of water.

If these two situations don't apply to you, neither your toilets nor your water softener is the issue, there may still be a leak in the home. Some other causes for higher water usage may be: a refrigerator ice maker leak, a washing machine that uses excess water, a boiler heating system that has a leak, a dripping outside faucet or a leaky hose outside, or anything else in the house that uses water.

One way to determine if there is a leak somewhere in the property is to check your meter, if it is located in the house. If the water meter is inside the home, it is often in a basement or in a utility closet. Make sure no water is being used in the home and look at the numbers on your meter - they should not be moving at all. There will also be a flow indicator on your meter; if that is moving, it indicates water is being pulled through the meter. Even a small leak will cause water to be drawn, so the numbers and indicator will be moving. (For more details, please see the How Do I Read My Meter video on our website.)

If your water meter is in a pit or vault outside of your home, the water usage that is measured is any water that passes through the meter, and then through the service line leading to your property. If you have high usage and your meter is in a pit or a vault, and you can't think of anything inside the home that would cause more water usage, the problem may be a leak on the service line leading to your home. However, if this is the case, you will usually see a wet spot in your

yard where your service line runs from the curb stop to the meter connection inside. Even if there is a leak is on the service line leading to your property, it is the homeowner's responsibility to maintain and repair.

Lastly, it is important to note that when a water meter malfunctions, it will slow down or stop reading altogether. It is extremely rare for a meter to read more than the amount of water that has actually passed through the meter. They are designed with the customer in mind in this way. Also, if there is a leak inside your property, a plumber would need to perform those repairs.

If you are still at a loss to determine the cause of your higher usage, please call the office and SCBWA customer service representatives can review your usage history to help determine what may have caused your high water bill.