

# TRAVIS COUNTY WATER CONTROL AND IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT 17

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## NEWS YOU CAN USE

### **Does your Water Usage or Bill Seem Abnormally High?**

Some homeowners were caught off guard by high water bills after the summer, and over the past few cycles the District billing clerks have continued to receive an increased number of customers calling with concerns regarding high water bills and questioning meter reads. Every water provider in the area is experiencing the same phenomenon.

Due to the flurry of news reports and articles in the press recently, there may be some confusion. It is good to see customers being more aware of their water usage and here is some additional information regarding WCID 17 operations which may be helpful in clearing up your questions.

### **I read in the paper that Austin was having billing and metering problems. Does that affect our area?**

No, WCID 17 is not a part of the City of Austin but is a separate entity with its own metering and billing system.

### **How are meters read? Could a meter be wrong?**

- Meters are read over several days in the middle of each month, usually the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup>, not at the end of the month. So, as stated on your bill, the bill you received at the end of October will reflect usage from mid-September to mid-October. Any changes you made to your water use patterns in the last two weeks of October **will not be reflected until** the next months' bill.
- WCID 17 **does not ever estimate** meter readings. Readings are made automatically by radio signal as the reader drives by in a District truck. The reader does not need to look at the meter dial and can get electronic readings even if the meter is buried in mud.
- A high usage bill **is unlikely a result of a meter error**. Meters are highly accurate and recording in the 95 percent to 100 percent capacity range. They have an electrical component and a mechanical component. These electrical and mechanical readings are compared annually by physically reading every meter. Meters can and do have problems; however, in virtually all cases when a meter malfunctions or shows signs of aging, the mechanical and/or electrical components slow down, read low and a malfunction is to the customer's benefit. There is no way to "speed up" a meter. Remember, a meter is a mechanical device. The dials on the register do not move unless water is flowing through the meter body. When the electronic component fails completely, no signal is sent to the electronic reader. In this case, the meter reader will physically read the mechanical register and replace the register unit. The mechanical register is still reading correctly.

### **Why is my bill so high?**

- Based on recent findings after investigating customer complaints, the majority of high bills are due to irrigation use. Following the substantial rains received during the month of June in the Highland Lakes basin, the Lower Colorado River Authority lifted the mandatory one-day per week outdoor drought watering schedule allowing firm water customers to return to their normal drought plan schedules. Per

the WCID 17 Drought Contingency Plan, customers were allowed to return to Stage 1 Outdoor Watering Schedule which is a two-day per week schedule from May 1 – September 30, anytime other than 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. All restrictions expired October 1, 2015 for residential customers.

- All area water providers, including WCID 17, had been on a mandatory one-day per week watering schedule, year-round, since May 1, 2012 (3 years). Many customers simply didn't realize that they were now watering twice as much or more because of the additional day and time allowed.
- After investigating complaints, checking meters and working with homeowners, WCID 17 staff has not identified any meter problems or billing errors; however, we will continue to investigate all inquiries. People are seeing higher bills due to higher water consumption most likely because of outdoor watering, or in some cases, unknown leaks.

### **I had much higher usage than normal. Why didn't the District call me?**

After every month's meter reads, if the billing system flags an account for high usage (over 50,000 gallons in the summer) the account is reviewed for most recent usage history. If usage is within about 20 percent, no notification is made because customer usage patterns may have changed. A customer may have had company or filled a pool, for example. If usage is way off, a technician is sent out to physically check the meter, re-read it, and check for any obvious signs of a leak. If a possible leak is detected, a door hanger is left at the home and/or a call is made to the customer. **Customers are ultimately responsible for monitoring their own water use and promptly repairing leaks.**

### **How can WCID 17 tell how my water might have been used?**

- Most WCID 17 meter electronic components can store usage patterns by hour and date for up to the past 90-days. The hourly graph is most useful because you are able to see your consumption by the exact time it flows through your meter and you will also be able to identify leaks by this information. The District technician can pull the data from your meter. The graphically displayed data can then be emailed to you. Unfortunately, because a technician must be sent out to extract the data, a trip charge must be assessed for each graph requested after the first one.

As with any electronic device, over the years a register can lose its ability to save data and must be replaced. This does not mean the current reading is inaccurate. The graph on your statement shows only total monthly usage.

- Customer's historic usage can be used to identify normal seasonal patterns and potential problems. Some higher than normal usage patterns are easily identified as a fixture left on, irrigation use, or a leak. A leak pattern and amount can be identified, but of course, **it is the responsibility of the homeowner to locate and repair the leak in a timely manner.**
- The following graphs show some data log examples of water usage. Our staff uses these graphs to help the customer understand the usage and the possible causes of unknown water usage.



4/22/2015 9:42 am

### MasterLink Data Collection System

Data Log Report

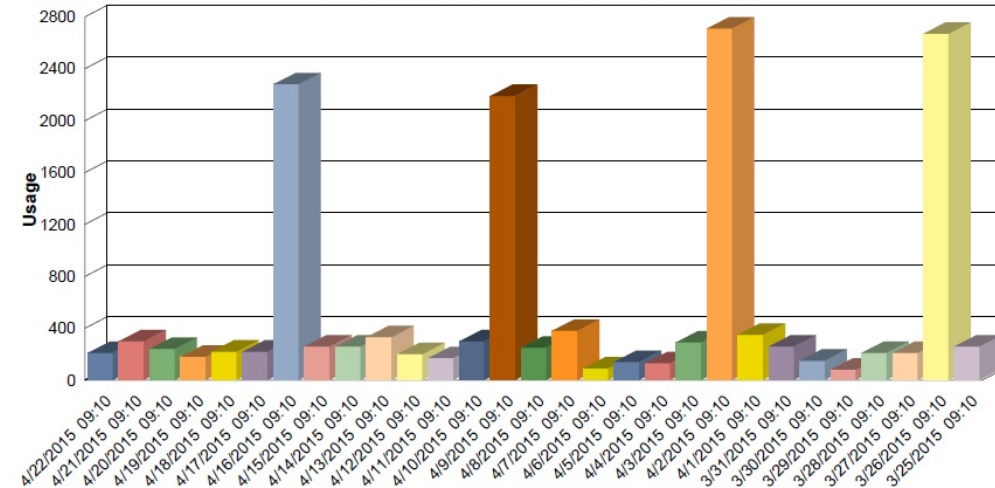
From: 2/3/2015 (09:10) To: 4/22/2015 (09:10)

Address:

Customer:

MeterSN: Electronic ID:

Peak Consumption: 2710 Occurred 4/2/2015 (09:10)



**Figure 1: NORMAL USAGE**

This graph is shown in 24-hour (daily) usage increments. It reflects normal indoor use and includes weekly irrigation use of approximately 2000 gallons. The total usage for the 29 days shown is approximately 15,540 gallons.



4/16/2015 3:12 pm

### MasterLink Data Collection System

Data Log Report

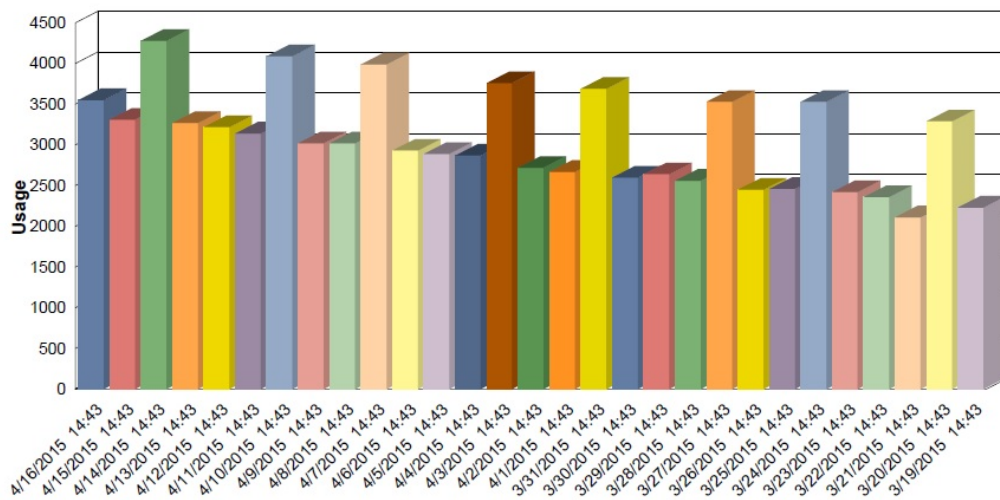
From: 1/17/2015 (14:43) To: 4/16/2015 (14:43)

Address:

Customer:

MeterSN: Electronic ID:

Peak Consumption: 4280 Occurred 4/14/2015 (14:43)



**Figure 2: INCREASING LEAK**

The graph in Figure 2 is shown in 24-hour (daily) usage increments. It reflects a growing leak with irrigation use two times per week. Total usage for this 29-day period was approximately 91,525 gallons.



9/26/2014 3:54 pm

Data Log Event: 11145716

## MasterLink Data Collection System

### Data Log Report

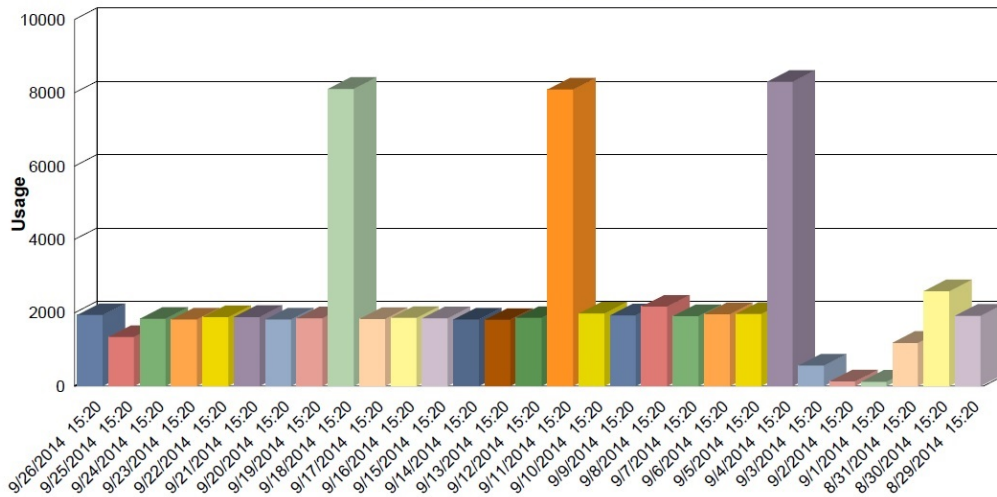
From: 7/15/2014 (15:20) To: 9/26/2014 (15:20)

Address:

Customer:

MeterSN: Electronic ID:

Peak Consumption: 8300 Occurred 9/4/2014 (15:20)



**Figure 3: CONSTANT LEAK**

This graph is shown in 24-hour (daily) usage increments. It reflects a constant usage starting on 9/5/2014 of approximately 2000 gallons, which is about 85 gallons per hour. This constant usage could have been as a result of a pinhole leak in an outdoor waterline that was not easily detected. The total usage for the 29 days shown is approximately 69,640 gallons.

When we review graphs that have similar usage patterns, but the constant usage is at a level of 450-500 gallons daily, this could be a result of an outside faucet that was left on or from a leaking toilet.



11/4/2015 5:14 pm

Data Log Event: 1518611:

### MasterLink Data Collection System

Data Log Report

From: 9/5/2015 (16:22) To: 11/4/2015 (16:22)

Address:

Customer:

MeterSN: Electronic ID:

Peak Consumption: 11370 Occurred 9/30/2015 (16:22)

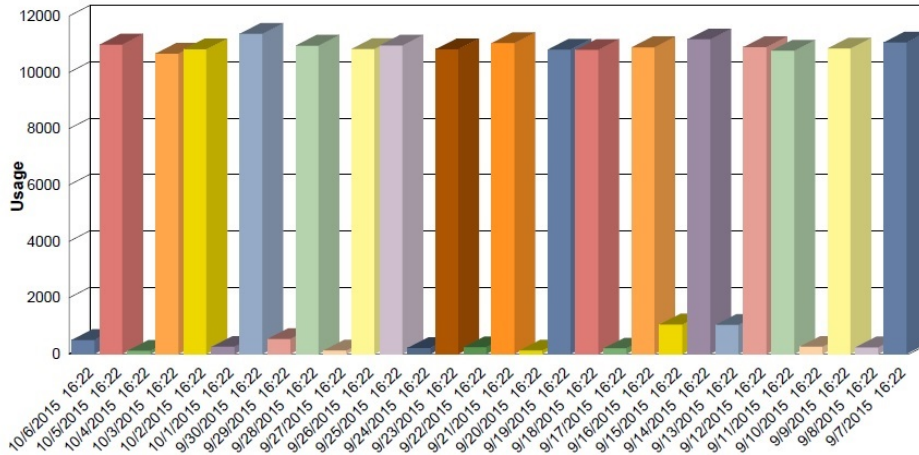


Figure 4: OVER WATERING

This graph reflects approximately 11,000 gallons of irrigation use more than every other day from September 7<sup>th</sup> to October 6<sup>th</sup>. The total usage shown in this graph is 190,530 gallons, which can be compared to the entire volume of the Comanche Trail Storage Tank.



9/16/2015 10:59 am

Data Log Event: 1469394:

### MasterLink Data Collection System

Data Log Report

From: 9/7/2015 (00:25) To: 9/16/2015 (10:25)

Address:

Customer:

MeterSN: Electronic ID:

Peak Consumption: 1280 Occurred 9/12/2015 (06:25)

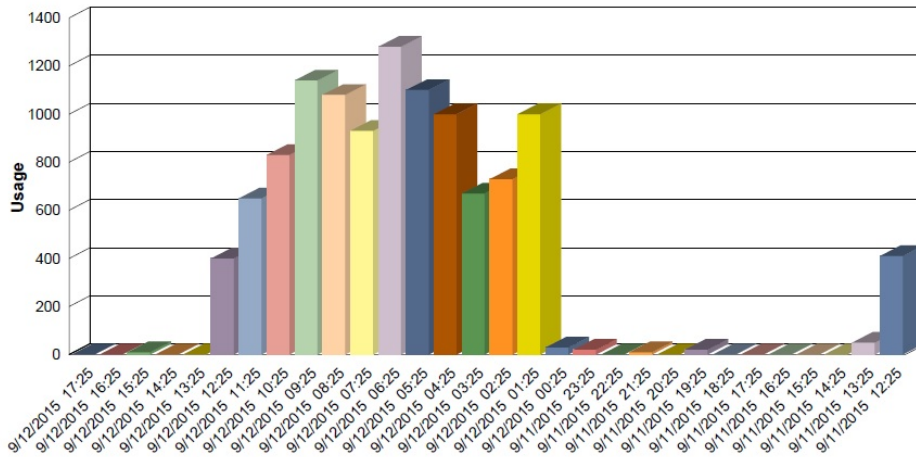


Figure 5: IRRIGATION PATTERN - OVERWATERING

This hourly detail graph shows clearly what happened on September 12<sup>th</sup> for the usage in Figure 4 above. The irrigation system started running at approximately 12:30 am and turned off at approximately 12:30 pm, resulting in over 10,000 gallons of usage during that system run.

### **What should you do if you think your water usage is abnormally high?**

Don't panic. Here's what to do:

- Do some simple checks around your property. Did someone leave a hose on? Do you have a running toilet? Is there a faucet with a constant drip?
- Check for a leak by reading the mechanical meter in your box. Turn off all water usage inside and outside your home (including auto pool fill if you have). Check the meter dial to see if the center is spinning, if so, you may have a leak. Contact a plumber to help you find it. Contact WCID 17 and ask for a graph to be pulled, this data may help.
- If the meter is not spinning, that's good, no leak. Next check all of your irrigation system program settings. How often are they set to run and for how long at each station? Do you know how much water the system uses each time it runs? Many people are shocked when they find out how much their system uses.
- If you are not sure how much water your irrigation system is using, you can take a meter reading and write it down, then run a complete irrigation cycle and take another reading. Subtract the first reading from the second to find the total irrigation usage per cycle; then multiply this number by the number of times the system runs each month to get the total irrigation usage per month. For example, if your system uses 4,000 gallons each time it runs one cycle and you water twice a week, your irrigation uses 32,000 gallons per month.
- Next add your irrigation usage to the estimated in-home water use to get the total estimated monthly usage. A household of two persons uses about 4,000 gallons per month in-home.
- If the usage amount still seems way off, contact WCID 17 and we will send a technician out to do a complete investigation. Remember, you can also request one free irrigation audit per year from WCID 17 by emailing [terrell@wcid17.org](mailto:terrell@wcid17.org) with "Irrigation Audit Request" in the subject line.

### **Can a meter be tested?**

Yes, we can send the meter to a third party tester, however, if the meter test comes back as satisfactory, you will be responsible to pay for the service call to change out the meter and for testing fees. This costs approximately \$120.

### **Can I get an adjustment on my bill?**

- Yes! If a meter or billing problem is discovered, we will promptly credit your account on the next billing statement.
- If you had a leak, and had it repaired, you can get an unintentional water loss adjustment once per year. Submit a copy of the repair bill with a request by letter or email. You will still have to pay for the water you used, but it will be at a reduced rate. Accounts will not be adjusted for irrigation over-use or fixtures left on, even if unintentional.

### **What if I'm still not satisfied?**

- If you are not satisfied with the staff resolution of your problem, please contact the General Manager, Deborah Gernes, email: [dgermes@wcid17.org](mailto:dgermes@wcid17.org), who will assist you and investigate the problem further.
- If you are still not satisfied with the action taken, you can attend a monthly Board of Directors meeting on the third Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m. at the District office to voice your concerns. Public Comment is posted for 6:30 p.m.
- We at WCID 17 strive for open communications and transparency. We are here to assist you in any way we can through good stewardship and open dialogue.