For more information on your rights, please visit us:

dcwater.com/disputing-bill or call:
Monday-Friday • 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. • 202-354-3600

Mail your letter to:
District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority
Customer Service Department
1385 Canal Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Effective April 11, 2019, the Office of the People’s Counsel is authorized to represent and advocate for DC Water Customers and their interests.
www.dcwater.com/OPClegislation
At the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water), we strive to be a world-class water utility. Our mission is to exceed expectations by providing high quality water services in a safe, environmentally friendly and efficient manner.

DC Water wants all customers to know their rights and responsibilities as water and wastewater users in the District of Columbia. This Consumer Bill of Rights (CBOR) recognizes that the services provided by DC Water are vital to all District of Columbia residents, and must be made and rendered under just and reasonable terms.
New Owners Establishing Service at Existing Premises
As a general rule, a property owner has the right to establish water service at a property, and is deemed the customer of record. Typically, water service is established by a change of property ownership through sale and/or title transfer. A customer or title company, acting on behalf of a customer, will provide DC Water with the required information to complete the change of ownership and settle the final water and sewer charges at the property. To establish new service at a property, DC Water does not require proof of credit or personal identifying information (social security, date and place of birth, and/or mother’s maiden name) from a customer.

New Owners Establishing Service at New Premise
To establish service at a new property, DC Water must approve all new connections to the municipal water and sewer system to ensure that all safety standards and code requirements are met. A meter must be installed prior to water use; however, the water service account will be billed for impervious area charges from the time of activation. DC Water owns and is responsible for installing all water meters, unless it provides authorization to a licensed master plumber to complete the installation on behalf of the customer. To ensure that service occurs on-time, the customer is encouraged to contact DC Water about connection to the water system early in the development process. Please note that DC Water may assess a one-time System Availability Fee during approval of the new service connection.

Non-property Owner Water and Sewer Customers
A non-owner can also be a water and sewer customer. DC Water will allow a property owner to approve third parties (e.g. tenants, agents, energy managers, and property managers) to have access to review account information online, to receive electronic billing, and to make payments on the account. DC Water will also permit court appointed and ordered persons to have access to account information and to make payment arrangements.

Is there a third party designation form?
Yes, there is and customers can submit a request via phone (202-354-3600) or email (customer.service@dcwater.com) with the third party’s information (name, phone, and email) that should be added to the account.

Does DC Water have an app?
DC Water customers can access their online accounts anywhere, anytime, from the convenience of their smartphone or tablet. The mobile My DC Water app is available—free of charge—for Android in the Google Play Store and for the iPhone in the Apple App Store.

This new capability is part of DC Water’s continued focus on improving customer service. DC Water first unveiled a revamped website in early 2017, then an upgraded customer portal in July 2017 and now introduces its mobile app for customers to access their online account, view their water usage and pay their bill.

Anyone can use the mobile app to make one-time payments for their water bill, as long as they have the account number (including check digit), house number and street address.
Water Meter
DC Water owns and is responsible for installing and maintaining all water meters in the District of Columbia. Customers are not permitted to tamper with the water meter(s), and shall provide DC Water with reasonable access to examine, read or determine whether meter repairs are needed. Most small water meters are housed in meter pits, typically located in public space near the front of the property. Other water meters, which service large commercial properties, can be found in meter vaults, typically located in public space on the sidewalk or in grassy areas.

The accuracy of a water meter may be tested in conjunction with the investigation of a challenged bill. A meter will be determined to be accurate if it registers between 98.5 and 101.5 percent on test flows. A customer may receive an adjustment to his/her bill if a meter is found to be malfunctioning. If you have questions about or would like to dispute the accuracy of your water bill, please contact DC Water.

Meter Reading
Meter readings explain how much water is being used during a time period at a property. DC Water measures water consumption using Ccf units which represents 100 Cubic feet of water. One Ccf is equivalent to 748 gallons. To determine the number of gallons of water used during a billing period, simply multiply the number of Ccfs located on the billing statement by 748. The average amount of water used by a residential household in the District of Columbia is approximately 6.2 Ccfs per month. Common causes for increased consumption can include people coming to visit and warmer weather activities (washing cars, watering the lawn, watering plants, etc.).

At a minimum, a customer’s meter should be read quarterly. DC Water can read most meters electronically as a result of its automated meter reading (“AMR”) system. The AMR system consists of small, low-power radio transmitters connected to individual water meters that send daily readings to a network of radio receivers, which are owned and maintained by DC Water. This AMR technology sends readings to a computerized billing system 4 times a day, and even more frequently for larger or commercial accounts. The AMR technology improves the accuracy of customer billing statements and eliminates the need for meter reading personnel to visit customer properties. However, meter reading signal cannot be transmitted if the radio signal is blocked. It is the customer’s responsibility to ensure the water meter top is clear of flower pots, trash cans, dirt, mulch, vehicles and other obstructions. DC Water recognizes technological failures may prevent and/or hinder the transmitter from functioning properly.

How does DC Water notify customers when meters are changed?
We leave door hangers on a visible spot, usually the front door. Sometimes customers also get a phone call if DC Water has a number on file. Customers have the option of scheduling a time for meter replacement.

What happens when a meter is not read for three consecutive months?
DC Water will provide estimated bills based on past usage until the Authority is able to get actual readings. DC Water will attempt to obtain actual readings by reaching out to customers or inspecting the meter. A customer may also submit photo evidence of their current meter reading to obtain a bill based on an actual reading.
What Fees are Assessed and Shown on Billing Statement
A customer shall receive a billing statement from DC Water monthly or every 26-34 days. The billing cycle shall be the period of time from a customer’s last meter read to the current meter read.

DC Water shall make certain that all fees assessed are properly displayed on the bill for the billing cycle that the charges were incurred. A customer’s billing statement will include charges for water usage, sewer usage, customer metering, clean rivers impervious area charge, and a water system replacement fee. Please note the following fees are for FY 2019, which will change in FY 2020:

• **Water and Sewer Usage Fees** are charges billed volumetrically for water usage. DC Water charges Residential Customers $2.91 per Ccf for usage between 0-4 Ccfs, and $3.90 per Ccf for usage greater than 4 Ccfs for water. All customers are charged $7.75 per Ccf for sewer.

• **Clean Rivers Impervious Area (CRIAC)** is a sewer charge based on the area on a property that is impervious (surface that stormwater cannot flow through, such as buildings, asphalt and/or concrete). These areas contribute to the District’s combined sewer overflows. Enacted in 2009, CRIAC fees cover the cost of the federally mandated Clean Rivers Project. The total amount of impervious area is converted into ERUs (Equivalent Residential Units) and reduced down to the nearest 100 square feet. Residential Customers are charged $23.00 per ERU per month.

• **Water System Replacement Fee (WSRF)** - Enacted in 2016, this fee is designed to cover the costs of the renewal and replacement of aging water mains and infrastructure over time. The fee is assessed based on a customer’s meter size and average flow. Low-income customers under DC Water’s Customer Assistance Program (CAP) do not pay this fee and CAP2 customers receive 50% off.

• **Metering Fee** is a flat fee charged to a customer based on the meter size at the property.

• **Stormwater Fee** is a charge of $2.67 per month assessed on behalf of the District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) for stormwater pollution control as required under the District’s separate storm sewer system (MS-4) permit, which accounts for roughly two-thirds of the city’s stormwater control infrastructure.

• **System Availability Fee (SAF)** - A one-time fee charged for new development projects that requires a new potable water and sanitary sewer connection, as well as the renovation or redevelopment projects for existing connections to the District’s potable water and sewer systems that requires an increase in the size of the meter. The SAF is charged to recover the proportionate share of the increased system costs associated with the larger water and sewer demands that new or larger connections place on the municipal water and sewer system. The amount charged is determined based on the meter size.

• **Backflow Prevention Assembly Fee (BPAF)** - Beginning August 2019, customers will be billed $6.70 for each backflow prevention assembly (BPA) on their property. BPAs are required by law to prevent non-potable water from mixing with potable water. Points where this can occur are called “cross-connections” and include law irrigation, fire sprinklers, swimming pools, boilers, cooling towers, chillers, and other systems.

• **Fats, Oils, and Grease Fee (FOGF)** - Beginning August 2019, customers will be billed $13.70 for each food-serving establishment (FSE) associated with their property. The new fee will help prevent fats, oils, and grease (FOG) from entering and damaging the sewer system. Only FSEs licensed with the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs will be affected by this fee.
Repairing a Leak
DC Water is authorized to repair, maintain and, where necessary, renew all water service pipes and building sewers from the water main or the public sewer to the property line of each lot, and to perform all such repairs, as necessary to maintain or improve any roadway, alley, minor street, highway or other public space above such repaired or renewed water service pipes or building sewers. Thus, upon notice, DC Water will investigate all complaints of leaking water and sewage to determine if the leak is in public space.

If the leak is determined to be in public space, DC Water will repair the leak at no cost to the property owner or customer. If the leak is determined to be on private property, or in public space but caused by the property owner or customer, then DC Water will notify the customer that they are responsible for the repairs - which must be completed by a registered master plumber at the customer’s expense. Failure to repair a leak that is a public nuisance, hazard, or damaging property, may result in termination of services until repairs are made. The customer must notify DC Water that the leak has been repaired.
**What Are High Usage Notifications (HUNA)?**

HUNA alerts will notify a customer via email or phone call if your water usage is higher than normal. If there is a problem within your home, such as a broken pipe or leaking toilet, HUNA might be your first indication. This may help you determine the source of your problem and avoid high water bills. Please note, this service is offered as a courtesy to our customers and does not guarantee a leak will be detected.

**How does HUNA work and how do I sign up for it?**

Signing up is easy. If you register at My DC Water, you’re automatically registered for the alerts via email. If you don’t have an online account, sign up for My DC Water today. You can only elect one notification option. Simply check your preference by visiting your online account and selecting the “water usage history.” Next, select AMR history and you will see on the bottom right side of the page “set high usage notification preference.” If you have questions, please call us at 202-354-3600.

You can also enroll in HUNA alerts by calling DC Water at 202-354-3600 or send an email to customer.service@dcwater.com to request high usage alerts via telephone. Be sure to include your name, service address, telephone number and DC Water account number.

DC Water’s HUNA service is linked to a powerful tool that tracks how much water you use on a daily, monthly and yearly basis. Once DC Water has tracked your water usage for a full year, we’ll let you know when your water usage is significantly higher for more than four consecutive days.

Most spikes in usage are caused by one of the following: a leaking toilet, an unattended hose, an internal plumbing problem or leaky faucet, but also could simple be the result of having more people in your home than usual, taking baths and showers, doing more loads of laundry than usual, making home improvements involving plumbing, doing a landscaping project or starting a new lawn, or washing your car more often than usual.

**How soon must a customer repair a leak?**

A leak must be repaired promptly and as soon as possible to the benefit of the customer. DC Water recognizes this may be a hardship for some customers and will acknowledge the request for an adjustment at the time repairs are completed to a retroactive period not more than 30 days (or one billing cycle). DC Water may adjust the bill for excessive water usage for underground leaks and if other conditions are satisfied.
Sewer Back-Ups
Sewer clogs, back-ups and stoppages can be very challenging and expensive for customers. Unless there is evidence that DC Water was negligent in maintaining, repairing, or installing the main sewer line, then the customer is usually responsible for resulting damages. However, if a customer is experiencing a sewer back-up, clog, or stoppage, they must contact DC Water to determine whether the public sewer main is backed-up or clogged. If the public sewer is functioning appropriately, then the customer must contact a licensed plumber to determine if the clog is in the sewer lateral located on the property. If the plumber discovers that the blockage is located between the property line and public main sewer, then they must submit a report of the findings to DC Water. DC Water shall remove the clog or blockage.

Bill Adjustments
DC Water understands that customers may have increased bills due to an unforeseen leak. Customers are responsible for investigating and monitoring higher than expected water usage and making necessary property repairs to service lines, fittings and fixtures to prevent water to run or waste. DC Water will investigate the cause and location of a leak when notified by the customer of the possibility of leaks. If the investigation discloses a leak, other than a meter leak, of indeterminate location in the underground service, or at some other location where the leak is not apparent from visual or other inspection, then DC Water will determine whether the leak is in public space, on private property, or on property that is under the control of the customer.

DC Water shall adjust a customer’s bill for the following:

Leaks in Public Space: These are leaks that have been determined to be the responsibility of DC Water. DC Water shall repair the leak and adjust the customer’s bill to equal the average consumption of water at the same premises for up to three previous comparable periods for which records are available. If the leak is determined to have been caused by the customer, then no adjustment will be made.

Keep in mind most clogs are avoidable!
Only pee, poop and toilet paper should go in the toilet. Nothing else should go down your toilet, especially not baby wipes or makeup wipes. Similarly, fats, oils, and cooking grease should be put in the trash, not down drains. Learn more at dcwater.com/protectyourpipes.
Meter Leaks: These are leaks that occur at the meter or in the meter pit for which DC Water may make the repairs. If the leak was not caused by the customer, and is determined to be on property that is not under the control of the owner or occupant, then DC Water will adjust the water and sewer service bill to equal the average consumption of water at the same premises for up to three previous comparable periods for which records are available, and as DC Water determines to be appropriate if the comparable records are unavailable.

Leaks in Private Space: These are leaks that have been determined to be on private property. The customer shall repair the leak, and upon written request from the customer, DC Water will adjust the bill(s) for the periods during which the leak occurred by up to 50% of the excess water usage over the average consumption of water at the same premises for up to three previous comparable periods for which records are available. DC Water will adjust up to 100% of the excess sewer charges resulting from an underground leak if it is determined that the water did not enter the wastewater system. DC Water may consider the customer’s negligence in discovering and reporting the leak to DC Water; steps taken by the customer to have the leak repaired after discovery or determination; and if the leak repair was made by a District registered master plumber. To receive an adjustment, the customer must submit a plumber’s report validating that the repairs are complete.

Meter Malfunction/Error: If a customer’s meter is determined to have malfunctioned, over-read or provided faulty computations or doubtful registrations, then DC Water may adjust a customer’s bill to equal the average consumption at the same premises for up to three previous comparable periods for which records are available.

In cases which all checks and tests result in inconclusive findings that provide no reasonable explanation for excessive consumption, no adjustment shall be made to the bill for any portion of the excessive consumption, except as may be approved by the General Manager, based upon a demonstration by the owner or occupant that such an adjustment will further a significant public interest.

How Rates are Set
Rates are set bi-annually through a year-long process that begins with a budget based on capital and operating needs. DC Water conducts a Cost of Service Study every three years as a good faith effort to study the impact of any rate change on its customers before submitting any rate for approval by the DC Water Board of Directors. Once the budget is approved by the Board of Directors, the proposed rate structure is published in the DC Register and communicated via various news and media outlets and DC Water holds a public hearing to provide customers the opportunity to comment on the proposed rates. Finally, the DC Water Board of Directors vote on the rate proposal in July, to be implemented in the new fiscal year (October 1st). Currently, DC Water is setting two-year budgets.

Did you know that DC Water is an independent authority within the District government and unlike some utilities does not make any profits?

We only raise enough revenue to pay the cost of providing safe and reliable water and wastewater service.
Disconnection and Restoration of Service for Non-Payment
DC Water may shut off the water services to any property if water charges have remained delinquent for 30 days or more from the date of the bill. Fifteen days prior to disconnection, DC Water will provide the customer and/or property owner written notice to make payment and other arrangements. If DC Water terminates services, the property owner and/or customer is assessed a termination fee of $50.00, and a reconnection fee of $50.00. A customer and/or property owner must pay all outstanding water and sewer charges, and penalties to restore water services.

Prior to a scheduled disconnection of service, a customer may make payment arrangements to pay water charges in installments. DC Water may allow a customer to pay water charges in installments up to 12 months based on the customer’s payment history and the amount of the delinquency. If a customer enters an installment agreement, DC Water will provide the customer with a written copy of payment terms that include start and end dates, the amount of outstanding charges, the amount of each monthly payment, and other conditions. Installments due are also listed on the monthly invoice. If the customer adheres to the repayment agreement during the installment period, DC Water will not terminate the customer’s water services for non-payment, nor assess any late fees, interest or penalties. A customer may renegotiate payment arrangements if they have incurred an unforeseen hardship that may prevent payment.

If a customer fails to comply with an installment arrangement, DC Water will disconnect services for non-payment and assess accrued interest, late fees and penalties.

A customer will be assessed a fee in the amount of $245.00 if water is restored at the property without authorization from DC Water.

Disconnection and Restoration of Service for Denial of Access or Failure to Repair: A customer shall provide DC Water access to the property to install, inspect and read meters, pits, vaults and other appurtenances. If access is denied, DC Water shall provide the customer written notice within three days. A customer may charged $100.00 if the property remains inaccessible to DC Water.

If DC Water determines that a leak and/or a condition on the property must be corrected, the customer will be notified in writing. DC Water shall provide the customer with 14 days to comply with the repair request, and/or longer depending on the nature of the repair. Water services will be terminated if the customer does not make the repair. Further, DC Water may terminate water services if a leak causes damage, a nuisance or an unsafe condition in public space.

The restoration of service will occur upon verification by DC Water that the issue is resolved.
Non-payment continued

Lien
In the District of Columbia, a lien may be placed against the property for water and sewer charges that are 60 days or more delinquent. Unpaid water and sewer charges remain with property, even if there is a change in ownership. DC Water provides a 10 day notice to the customer of its intention to file a lien for delinquent water and sewer charges. DC Water files a certificate of delinquency with the District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds, on any and all unpaid water charges.

To be deemed valid, a certificate of delinquency shall indicate the amount of outstanding charges along with the real property address, lot and square information. The water lien is a continuing lien on the property, and it can only be satisfied if the customer and/or property owner pays the delinquent amount, penalties, interest, and administrative costs. A lien for water and sanitary sewer charges shall have priority over any other lien, except a lien for District taxes.

Assessment of Interest fees
All current charges that are not paid by the due date of the bill will be subject to an additional 10% late charge.

Any charges that have been outstanding for 60 days or more are assessed 1% interest compounded monthly. Bill amounts associated with bill disputes or administrative hearing with DC Water will not be assessed interest or additional charges while under determination.

Dispute Resolution Process: An owner or occupant may challenge their most recent bill by either: a) Paying the bill under protest and notifying DC Water in writing that they believe the bill to be incorrect; or, (b) Not paying the current charges contained in the bill and notifying DC Water in writing, within 10 working days after receipt of the bill of the reason(s) why the bill is believed to be incorrect.

OPC Assistance: The Office of the People’s Counsel (OPC) is the statutory advocate for matters concerning DC Water. If you have a complaint or concern about your DC Water service, you may contact OPC at 202-727-3071 to talk with a consumer complaint resolution specialist.

Challenges received after the 10-day period will be deemed untimely and will not stop the imposition of a penalty for non-payment of charges or the possibility of termination of service for non-payment. If the bill is not paid, but a challenge is made within 10 working days after receipt of the bill by the customer, DC Water will suspend the customer or owner’s obligation to pay the disputed bill until they has been provided a written decision of the results of the investigation. DC Water will investigate a challenged water, sewer or groundwater bill. DC Water’s written decision will include the date that the bill should be paid and the amount.

If it is determined that the bill is erroneous, DC Water shall adjust the bill accordingly and refund any overcharges paid.

How often can a customer request an audit of the meter? Is there a charge for the audit? If so, how much?

DC Water provides one (1) audit free of charge during a 24-month period. A second audit within that 24 month period results in an assessment of a $125.00 service fee.

Administrative Hearing Procedure: If the customer or owner is not satisfied with DC Water’s decision from the investigation, then they may request in writing an administrative hearing within 15 calendar days of the date of the decision. The customer and/or owner is not relieved of the responsibility for paying all previously or subsequently rendered, uncontested water, sewer and groundwater service charges, penalties, interest, and administrative costs.

If you want to have an attorney represent you at the administrative hearing, you can contact OPC at 202-727-3071. An OPC attorney will review the facts of your complaint and explain the merits of your case.
A customer may request an administrative hearing to appeal DC Water’s decision pertaining to the validity of any water, sewer or groundwater sewer service charge. At an administrative hearing, a customer may represent themselves or be represented by an attorney; present their case or defense by oral or documentary evidence; submit rebuttal evidence; and conduct a cross-examination as may be required for a full disclosure of the facts. The customer shall be notified of the hearing date in writing.

The hearing is administered by a neutral third party, an Administrative Hearing Officer. At the hearing, both DC Water’s representative and the customer and/or property owner will present their respective cases to the Administrative Hearing Officer. In most instances, the Administrative Hearing Officer will render a decision within 30 days of the close of the hearing. The Hearing Officer’s final decision shall contain a concise statement of facts, conclusions of law, and specific findings on each issue of fact. It shall also be based on entire record and evidence. If the Hearing Officer rules in favor of the customer and/or owner, and finds that customer and/or owner made payments in excess of the amount due, the appropriate portion of the funds, plus any accrued interest, shall be credited to the customer and/or owner’s account within 15 days of the notice of decision. If the Hearing Officer rules in DC Water’s favor, then the customer and/or owner shall be required to pay the difference between the amount in escrow and the amount of outstanding charges, penalties, interest, and fees within 15 days of the notice of the decision. A customer may appeal a Hearing Officer’s ruling to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals within 30 days from the date of the written decision.

Refund and Credit Policy: A customer may apply for a refund of any payments made in error, within two years of payment. DC Water will review the customer’s application to determine if a refund or credit is owed. The customer shall be notified of DC Water’s position within 30 days.

How DC Water Uses Your Water Usage Data
DC Water does not sell or monetize any customer data and we take extensive steps to guard against data breaches or hackers.

What assistance does DC Water offer if I can’t pay my bill?

1. Extended payment plans: Please call customer service at 202-354-3600 for extended payment plan options.

2. SPLASH (Serving People by Lending A Supporting Hand): SPLASH is a DC Water program that helps customers facing financial emergencies. SPLASH is funded by contributions from employees, customers and the community, and every dollar is distributed to eligible customers. Visit dcwater.com for more information.

3. Customer Assistance Program (CAP): Funded by DC Water, CAP provides eligible DC Water customers a discount on the first 4 hundred cubic feet (4 Ccfs) or (3,000 gallons) of water and the first 4 Ccfs (3,000 gallons) of sewer services used each month. The annual discount is about $760.00. Eligible households also receive a 50% reduction off the monthly CRIAC and a waiver of the entire Water Service Replacement Fee.

4. Customer Assistance Program II (CAP2): Funded by DC Water and the District, CAP2 provides eligible DC Water customers a discount on the first 3 Ccfs of water use and first 3 Ccfs of sewer services used each month, with the exception of the PILOT and ROW fees. Eligible households also receive 50% off the monthly billed CRIAC charges. The annual discount is approximately $520.00.

5. DOE Customer Assistance Program: A new assistance program (CAP3) funded by the District, CAP3 provides eligible DC Water residential customers with a discount of 75% off the monthly CRIAC. The average annual discount is approximately $210.00.

Eligibility for the CAP, CAP2 and CAP3 programs is determined by DOE using federal low-income guidelines. Applicants must provide: most recent tax return, photo identification and a current utility bill. For more information and to apply please visit DOEE’s website or call 202-535-2600. More information is available at dcwater.com/customer-assistance.