

City of Somerville Utilities

Plain Language Customer Information Sheet

Date: _____ Receipt No.: _____ Deposit Amount: _____ () Cash () Check# _____
Account No.: _____

This document is provided to questions you may have about your utility account; please review the information and keep a copy for your records. The full text of the Water and Wastewater Ordinance of the City of Somerville is available upon request at City Hall.

When is my meter read?

City meters are read on or around the 15th of each month. The City uses a digital remote sensor to read the meters and normally does not have to enter your property to do so.

When is my bill due?

Utility bills are mailed on or near the 1st of each month, and are due and payable **immediately**. Utility bills become **past due** (or delinquent) on the first business day after the 15th of each month, and a late charge is added to the bill if it is not received by the close of business on the due date (the 15th), unless the 15th falls on a City holiday or weekend in which case the payment will be processed without a late fee on the following business day.

Where should I pay my bill?

Utility bills may be paid by mail, if you are sending a check, money order, etc. If you mail your payment, the City usually counts the payment date based on the cancellation stamp (not the date on your check!) Cash payments should (and all other payments may) be made at City Hall during regular business hours. The City advises against placing cash payments in the mail or in the after-hours drop box. City Hall is located at 150 8th Street. The mailing address is P.O. Box 159, Somerville, Texas 77879. Business hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. (and the phone number is (979) 596-1122).

What happens if I don't pay the bill by the due date?

Well, of course, a late fee is assessed, but you will also get a Notice of Delinquency (also called a Final Notice). This notice will tell you how much you owe, including the late fee, and give a cut-off date, which is the **26th** of the month. If you do not pay the bill **by the end of business on the day before the cut-off date**, a worker will be sent out to shut off your utilities, and you will not be reconnected until you have paid the bill in full, including the late fee, and paid a \$50.00 reconnection fee (no personal checks accepted for these payments). The City may also increase the required deposit for your account. If so, this must also be paid prior to reconnection. The City usually tries to ensure that customers have at least one day before any holiday or weekend to come in and pay the past due amounts and fees and make arrangements for reconnection. If you do not make arrangements within a week of the cut-off, your account will be closed, your deposit will be applied to the balance due, and you will be required to reapply for service.

How much is the late fee?

The late fee is ten percent (10%) of the unpaid balance on the account as of the date it is past due (generally, the 16th). If you make your payment after the due date by mail or in the after-hours box, and do not include the late fee, your account is **not** considered to be paid in full. You will receive a Notice of Termination and you may be **disconnected for non-payment** if the late fee is not paid before the cut-off date. The City may require late payments to be made in cash or by cashier's check or money order.

Can I protest the cut-off of my utilities?

You may protest cut-off of your utility services by submitting a request for a hearing at the same address for making utility payments within five (5) days of the mailing date of the disconnect notice.

Can I pay the worker who comes out to turn off the service?

No.

If I pay the bill at 4:25 P.M., will you still reconnect it that day?

No. Reconnections are not made after business hours or on weekends or holidays.

What if I have a hot check?

If your check "bounces" (or a bank draft is refused payment) you will receive a notice from the City requiring you to pay the check or draft, a late fee if appropriate, and a returned check fee of \$25.00, and the City will not accept a check or draft for payment of your utility account for 24 months following the return. You will have ten days for the date of the notice to make the payment. The City may also increase your deposit amount.

What do I do if I am moving and no longer need utilities at my service address?

You should contact the City and tell us when you want the utilities shut off. If you contact us, there is no charge for this service call. If you **abandon** the service (leave without asking for a cut-off), you will be responsible for use charges until the City shuts the account off for non-payment, plus any fees related to the disconnection, and an annual service fee of \$25.00 will be charged on any remaining deposit. Failure to properly close an account may make it more difficult or expensive to get utility service in the future, especially since no

one with any unpaid utility bills will be provided with service till the debt is paid in full. If you are moving to a new address in town you may be able to transfer your account, and if your account is in good standing, you may not have to make a new deposit.

How do I get my deposit back?

After you inform the City that you want to cut off your service, we will apply your deposit to the last bill. If the deposit does not cover the last bill, we will send you a final bill. If the deposit does cover the final bill, the City will issue a check in the account holder's name to the billing address on file, unless you provide another address to us in writing when you ask us to close the account. If you owe any money to the City or the municipal court, the rest of the deposit may be applied to that debt, rather than being returned. The City has up to 60 days to return the deposit, but it usually takes less time.

Something is wrong with my water service, or my sewer lines are stopped up. What do I do?

You have two options. You may call the City and report the problem or you can call a plumber. The City does not make repairs to water or sewer lines on the customer side of the connection (generally at the meter for water, or at the tap (in the street) for sewer), but we will investigate a reported problem. If the problem is on your side of the meter or the sewer tap, you will be charged for a service call, and you will need to make arrangements for repairs. If the problem is on the City side of the connection, you will not be charged for a service call. If your call is after hours and you feel that the problem is urgent or you request that the City come out after normal business hours or on the weekend, the fee for the service call, if applicable, will be higher. *Since our experience shows that about 60% to 70% of reported problems are on the customer side, you may save money by calling a plumber first.*

I couldn't possibly have used this much water. What can I do?

Three things. **1. Check for leaks around your property.** Make sure the toilet isn't running, or that an outdoor faucet has not been left on. Check to see that there are no unusual puddles or ponds along the service line. The City is not responsible for leaks on the customer's side of the connection. If you find a leak on your side, call a plumber to help you resolve the issue. **2.** If you really think that the meter reading is incorrect, you can ask the City to **re-read the meter.** If you are wrong, a \$25.00 fee will be charged for the re-read. If you are right, the re-read fee will not be charged, and the bill will be adjusted as appropriate. And, **3.** Although the City has a schedule for maintaining and replacing meters as they age, it is possible that an occasional meter no longer records the amount of water used accurately enough. If you suspect that this is the case, you can **request that the meter be replaced.** There is a \$35.00 fee for this replacement which may be charged when you make the request, or billed, at the City's option. Afterwards, the City will take your meter to a lab and have it tested for accuracy, and provide you with a copy of the report. If the meter passes the test, you will be responsible not only for the meter replacement fee, but also for the cost of taking the meter to the lab, the testing and any other lab fees related to the testing (\$125.00 minimum). If the meter was not accurately recording the use, you will not be billed for the replacement, and your bill may be adjusted.

I am digging on my property, and I need to know where the utility lines are. Can the City find them for me?

No. The City may help you find the clean-out (sewer line) and the meter (water line) for your property, which are generally located at or near the property line, but the lines connecting your house or building to the meter or clean out do not belong to the City, and we cannot be responsible for determining where they are located. It is highly recommended that anyone doing excavation call 8-1-1 to have gas and telephone lines located (they will not locate water and sewer lines) to prevent loss of service or costly repairs.

What is tampering?

By law, the City is responsible for protecting the water supply, and the health and well-being of the citizens it provides utility service to. This is an expensive prospect with the cost of water rising, the increasing cost of meeting environmental and regulatory requirements, the need to stay on top of emergency repairs, and the unavoidable cost of replacing aging facilities and components. Tampering is anything that disrupts, damages, or threatens to damage the water or wastewater system or any of its components. It also refers to theft of service by re-routing water to avoid a meter, disabling or damaging a meter or hooking into the City system illegally to avoid setting up an account or paying for services. Activities such as these may result in cross-connections or potential contamination of the water system that serves all of us. It increases the City's operating costs for both personnel and equipment. And theft of service, bad debt, hot checks, abandonment of accounts and similar activities ultimately increase the cost of utility service for responsible citizens. People who commit these acts may be charged for the stolen services, denied future service or reconnection of service, pay additional penalties and fees, and may be cited. The maximum fine for these violations is \$2000.00 per day, per violation.

What is that \$2.00 assessment on my bill and why is it there?

The \$2.00 voluntary fee on the municipal utility bill is donated to the Somerville Volunteer Fire Department that serves the citizens of Somerville. This fee helps pay for equipment, supplies, and other expenses related to fire protection for your property. This funding directly affects property insurance rates in the City of Somerville.

If you have other questions or concerns about your utility account or service, please feel free to call City Hall at (979)-596-1122 and we will be glad to help you find the answers you need.