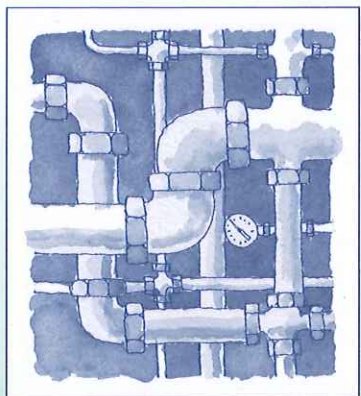




Waterlines

NOVEMBER 2015

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE MEDFORD WATER COMMISSION



We've got some pipes!

The Medford Water Commission maintains more than 550 miles of water mains. That's roughly enough to reach from Medford to Portland and back!

Our mains vary in size from 4 to 48 inches in diameter, delivering water to about 130,000 people throughout the valley.

Throughout the United States and Canada, there are approximately one million miles of water pipeline and aqueducts — enough to circle Earth 40 times!

Committed to:

Excellence in Water Quality
Professionalism
Customer Service
System Reliability

Contact us:

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RATES TO RISE

In our August newsletter, we noted that a rate study being conducted by an independent consultant was nearing completion, and that early indications were that rates were likely to rise more than has been typical for us.

Since that time, the rate study has undergone considerable review, and while modifications have been made, the bottom-line need for rate increases has remained much the same.

Following are questions and answers aimed at explaining what increases are likely, why they are more than usual, as well as providing some comparisons for perspective.

When will rate changes occur and how much will they be? Rate changes will go into effect on January 1, 2016, with the amount of change varying between customer groups. Because a primary objective of the rate study was to assure that the share of costs paid by different customers is equitable, some customers will see larger increases than others, and customers within water



Construction at the water treatment plant

districts will see a one-time decrease in their rates. Overall, however, increases for 2016 will average 12%.

How much will this impact a typical bill? Using single family residences in Medford as an example, a typical monthly winter bill will go up by about \$1.40. During a hot summer month, an average residence will see its charges increase by approximately \$3.60.

(Continued on Page 2)

PREPARE FOR WINTER

In our local area, many winters are mild enough that frozen pipes are not a concern. But every few years, we get spells of unusually cold weather that always catch people unprepared. At a minimum, frozen pipes are an inconvenience. Worse, they can cause costly damage. Therefore, in addition to tips on our website, winterizing is a frequent topic in our fall newsletters.



Following are actions worth pursuing:

Before the cold hits:

- ✓ Be prepared to turn water off quickly if a pipe breaks; locate water shutoff valves and confirm they turn easily. Hint: Often the shutoff is next to the water meter.
- ✓ Insulate pipes in unheated locations, including crawl spaces, garages and outdoors.

(Continued on Page 2)

RATES

(Continued from Page 1)

Why are overall rate increases this year larger than usual? A combination of factors have contributed to this year's increases, the primary one being that over the last four years, rate evaluations were not conducted each year as we normally do.

While some water providers make occasional large rate changes that incorporate anticipated costs for multiple years, our preference has been to make smaller annual adjustments that increase only enough to meet the costs for the upcoming year. We were unable to do so during the last few years due to a complicated computer software changeout. This in turn delayed the rate analysis being conducted by the consultant. Last winter it was recognized that lack of any rate change for yet another year could result in the need for a very large increase in 2016. A modest across-the-board increase was therefore implemented in March of 2015. This helped, but didn't alone resolve shortfalls.

How does the proposed rate change compare with other water utilities? Water providers across

the nation have been facing larger than normal rate increases. Although our upcoming increase is high on a percentage basis, the increase from a dollars-and-cents perspective is not comparatively large. Our charges both before and after the upcoming rate increase are extremely low compared with water providers across the state and nation.

For example, based on a survey of Oregon water suppliers that we conducted in April of 2015, the average charge for typical winter usage for a residence was approximately \$26 per month, while our charge for a Medford customer was about \$11. In a hot summer month, an average bill in Medford has been approximately \$28, whereas the average charge for a comparable amount of water usage elsewhere in Oregon was \$86.

Are water charges likely to increase just this year or over multiple years? Rate studies and resulting rate decisions are typically made one year at a time, although we do attempt to look forward a few years in an effort to minimize and smooth out increases. Based on current evaluations, larger than normal rate increases may be needed for the next few years. However, the Board of Water Commissioners is reviewing all options for limiting future rate increases.

✓ Winterize sprinkler systems too. These often aren't equipped to blow water out, but other actions will help minimize damage:

- Shut off water to the entire sprinkler system. If there isn't a valve to isolate the irrigation system, consider adding one. Valves from backflow prevention devices should not be used for this; they should be left open so they can drain.
- Turn time clocks off. Temporarily disconnecting the common wire will also assure that the system can't activate accidentally.
- Drain sprinkler components as much as possible. Briefly propping open sprinkler risers (rubber bands wrapped around them works well) will help them to drain.
- Insulate exposed valves. Use materials like bubble wrap that won't absorb water, or cover other insulation well with plastic.

During freezing weather:

- ✓ To avoid freezing the meter during extreme cold, open the lid only if necessary to turn water off, and close it as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Place the cardboard and foam pieces you prepared earlier into crawl space vents.
- ✓ Keep a trickle of water running from faucets that are on outside walls and/or are farthest from the point where the main water line enters the house.
- ✓ Heat all rooms with plumbing fixtures, particularly those with plumbing on outside walls. Open cabinet doors under sinks to let heat in.
- ✓ If a pipe freezes, never thaw it with an open flame. Use a hair dryer, heat lamps or space heaters.
- ✓ If you're away during cold spells, ask a friend to check your house and take these actions for you.

Waterlines

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Medford Water Commission

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PREPARE

(Continued from Page 1)

- ✓ Cut cardboard or foam pieces to size for temporary placement in crawl space vents to seal them during very cold weather.
- ✓ Detach garden hoses from faucets and add freeze caps over the hose bib.
- ✓ Insulate pool equipment and piping that is exposed to the weather.
- ✓ Leave household heat on to at least 55° F if you will be going away during winter.