



BREWER WATER DEPARTMENT

223 Green Point Road
Brewer, ME 04412

Telephone (207) 989-4214
Fax (207) 989-2883

YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS A BWD CUSTOMER

KEEP THIS INFORMATION FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

This information sheet was prepared according to standards set by the Maine Public Utilities Commission (MPUC). It describes our billing procedures, the minimum standards we must follow for service, and how to file a complaint if you are not satisfied.

Throughout this information, the terms “we” or “us” refer to the Brewer Water Department; the term “you” refers to the customer. The “MPUC” refers to the Maine Public Utilities Commission.

Our office hours are 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday (excluding holidays). Our service truck is available 7:45 a.m.- 3:45 p.m. Monday-Friday (excluding holidays). Limited emergency service is provided for nights, weekends, and holidays at the discretion of the Department and at customer expense.

APPLICATION FOR SERVICE

Applying for Service: You must apply for service in writing before we accept you as a customer. You must apply as soon as you are responsible for the service, and provide all necessary information. We charge a service establishment fee of \$20.00, payable at time of application, each time you sign for service. Service may be disconnected if you fail to complete the application process.

In signing for the service, you agree to abide by the Department’s terms and conditions. You are also responsible for notifying us to terminate water service and for providing complete information for a final bill. In multi-unit buildings, tenants are allowed to sign for service only if there is a separate outside shut-off for each unit.

Scheduling: We require a minimum two business-day notice to turn on a service or set a water meter, unless the service has been disconnected for non-payment. We require a minimum 2 business-day notice to discontinue service; termination of service may involve removal of the meter. We can bill you for service until you give the required notice or until we disconnect, whichever is first. These services are available during our business hours, and someone must be on the premises when we turn the water on or remove the meter.

Old Unpaid Bills: When you apply for service, we will check to see if you have had service with us before. If you have an unpaid bill, we will ask you to pay it or to sign a payment agreement. We can require you to pay bills that are up to six (6) years old. We cannot ask you to pay anyone else’s bill--only those bills in your name or bills which the court has said you are responsible for. If you dispute the old bill or you are unable to agree with us about a reasonable payment plan, see the “Complaints” section of this handout.

Non Discrimination: No matter what country you are from, what sex or race you are, whether you are married or single, young or old, we will either agree to provide the service you ask for or deny it within (1) business day after you ask for the service. If we deny service, we will send you the reasons in writing and tell you what you can do about it.

BILLING

Meter Reading: The Department reads meters on a quarterly basis in February, May, August, and November.

Billing: The Department bills on a quarterly basis, March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1. The first water bill that you receive is what we call a Minimum in Advance. This first bill represents the first step of our rate structure. Depending on the date that you request water service for your property, this bill represents the remaining time left in the existing billing quarter. All water bills after this initial minimum in advance shall represent actual water used, except for the first 900 cubic feet of water; this is always billed in advance. When or if you have the water disconnected for any reason, this minimum in advance (900 cubic feet) will be subtracted from the water bill.

Water Consumption: Water bills are based on water consumption, measured by a water meter in your basement or utility closet. Most locations are equipped with meters which can be read from the outside of the building. At locations without remote-read meters, meter readers will need access to your property every three months (about two weeks prior to billing) to read the meter. If you are not at home, the meter reader will leave a postpaid card which you must return with a meter reading. The post card is generally left in the front door; postcards cannot be left in the mail box due to post office regulations.

Water Charges: Most residential locations are equipped with a 5/8 inch meter. Currently, the minimum quarterly charge for this size meter is \$67.74. Under the minimum charge you are allowed up to 900 cubic feet, for consumption over 900 cubic feet the charge is \$3.43 per 100 cubic ft. One hundred cubic feet of water is approximately 748 gallons.

Meter Tests: We test meters periodically to make sure they are operating correctly. The MPUC approves the schedule of meter tests and the accuracy standards. If you want your meter tested for accuracy, we will do so at no cost to you, and you may witness the test during business hours if you tell us when we remove the meter. If you ask more often than once every 18 months, we will charge you a fee of (\$50.00 based on meter size). The fee will be refunded if the meter is inaccurate. You can check the accuracy of your bill and monitor your own usage by reading the meter yourself. Ask the meter reader how to do so.

Estimated Bills: We will try to send you a bill based on actual usage. If we cannot obtain a reading because your meter is not accessible or the remote is not functioning, we will leave a postcard and send a minimum bill. If you call in your reading or send us the postcard promptly, we will issue a bill based on actual usage.

Make-Up Bills: If we have to issue a make-up bill for past service that you were not billed for, we will offer you a payment plan. If the reason for the make-up bill is our fault (equipment failure or billing error, for example) you will be billed for only one (1) year of the past service even if the billing mistake was for a longer time.

Past Usage: If you ask for it, we will provide a record of your usage going back a maximum of 13 months.

Third Party Notice: Let us know if you want another person to get a copy of any bill or disconnection notice we send you. We will send a copy to the person you designate, but you are still responsible for payment. This service may be especially important for our elderly or disabled customers.

Water Questions: If you have any questions about the cost of water service or other services, you can call us at 989-4214. Our rates must be approved by the MPUC and we cannot change these rates without approval of the MPUC. You have the right to review and comment on proposed rate changes, before the MPUC rules.

Sewer Questions: Although water and sewer bills are mailed together (and sewer charges are based on water consumption), the sewer billing is a function of the City of Brewer Sewer Department. Sewer questions must be directed to the Sewer Billing Clerk at 989-7502.

PAYMENT OF BILLS:

You should pay your bill as soon as possible. Water bills are considered past due 25 days from the mailing date. You can pay your bill by cash, check, or money order. If you have more than one returned check (for non-sufficient funds), we may require you to pay by cash or certified check/money order only. You should include your bill stubs with payment or note the account number on your check. You may write one check for both water and sewer payments. Low income customers may qualify for help in paying a utility bill. The best source of information is your municipality's public assistance department or Penquis Community Action Program at 973-3500.

Payment Agreements: We will continue service even if you can't pay your account in full, as long as you pay a reasonable portion of your bill and you agree to pay the rest in affordable weekly or monthly payments. You must also agree to pay all future bills within 30 days of the postmark date until the overdue amount is paid in full. We will consider the following in establishing a payment agreement: a) your ability to pay; b) your previous payment history; c) the reason why the bill can't be paid; d) how long the bill has remained unpaid; and e) whether disconnection would pose a danger to your household.

We will send you a written copy of the payment arrangement. If you do not make payments according to that agreement, we can send you a disconnection notice that gives you three (3) business days to pay the full overdue amount. We are not required to make a second agreement, but we will try to respond to your particular situation.

DISCONNECTION

We don't want to disconnect your service. We will work with you to resolve any problem. However, if a customer refuses to cooperate, we have the right to start disconnection proceedings if you:

- * Fail to pay or make a payment agreement for an overdue bill
- * Don't keep a written payment agreement
- * Fail to pay a deposit, to arrange for payment of deposit, or to provide someone willing to guarantee payment
- * Use the service without completing the application process
- * Refuse to let us on the property to install a meter or to repair/replace the Department's property
- * Tamper with the meter or manage to obtain service without payment
- * Misrepresent who you are to get service
- Theft of water, unauthorized use, receiving unmetered water
- * Fail to comply with a decision of the MPUC or its Consumer Assistance Division

We are not allowed to disconnect for a: unpaid non-basic service charge; b: an old bill that was not properly transferred to your account; c: in a medical emergency (see "Medical Emergency" section) or d: estimated use.

Notice: In most cases, we will notify you at least fourteen (14) calendar days before the disconnection date in the notice, but we will give you only three (3) business days notice if, a: you have broken a payment agreement, b: failed to pay a deposit, c: paid with a bad check; or d: failed to apply for service. We can disconnect without notice only if there is unauthorized use (meter tampering) or a dangerous condition. A disconnection notice is good for ten (10) business days after the disconnection date stated on it. The ten (10) days may be extended if you refuse to give us access to the meter or other device to turn off the service. We will not disconnect service on a Friday, a weekend, a legal holiday, the day before a holiday, or on any day our office is not open for business.

Tenant: If you are a tenant and the landlord asks us to disconnect, or if your landlord does not pay the bills, we will issue you a tenant notice and give you the opportunity to put the service in your name. You do not have to pay the landlord's unpaid bill.

Reconnection/Non-Payment: We must reconnect service again promptly provided you have paid your overdue bill or have agreed to a payment plan. We must reconnect during the same business day you settle your account, or the next business day at the latest. If our serviceman calls at your premises to collect an overdue payment, we will charge you a \$10.00 collection fee. If your water service is disconnected for non-payment, we will charge you a \$40.00 reconnection fee during business hours.

We can also require a deposit equal to two quarter's service if you are disconnected for non-payment, unauthorized use, or theft of service. When both a deposit and the unpaid bill are required, you may pay the smaller amount in full and enter a payment agreement on the larger amount.

Medical Emergency: We will not disconnect or refuse to reconnect service when you or someone in your house is seriously ill, provided a registered physician confirms that an emergency exists. If you cannot get a doctor to call right away, you may let us know yourself. We will wait three (3) business days for the doctor to call or write. We require written certification from the doctor, including specific reasons why the service is necessary and how long the emergency will last. Disconnection can be postponed due to a medical emergency for up to 30 days and can be renewed up to 90 days. A medical emergency does not cancel a bill. We will refer you to financial assistance agencies and ask you to negotiate a reasonable payment plan.

COMPLAINTS

If you have questions or complaints, call us. We have employees available during business hours to answer your questions, set up payment agreements, and resolve disputes. We will investigate your complaint and try to resolve it. If you disagree with our answer, you have the right to appeal to the Consumer Assistance Division of the MPUC, State House Station 18, Augusta, Me. 04333-0018 or call 207-287-3831 or 1-800-452-4699. Before you write or call the Commission, you must give us a chance to respond to your complaint. We cannot disconnect you for a disputed amount, but you do have to pay that portion of the bill that is not disputed. If you contact us before the disconnection date, and we cannot agree on a payment plan or other requirements to stop disconnection, you can appeal to the MPUC as described above.