
City of Chicopee's Water Meter and Reading System Improvements

OVERVIEW OF THE WATER METER AND READING SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

Chicopee Public Works is commencing its meter replacement program with a new wireless meter technology that will improve customer service by capturing electric and water reads in a more efficient manner. The new water meter and reading system improvements will install new, more accurate meters that can be read via radio frequencies that send consumption data directly to the City for billing. This system also has the capability of providing leak detection both within the City's water distribution system and within individual homes and businesses. The new meter technology will increase accuracy, eliminate estimates, and lower operational costs.

Chicopee Electric Light's meter infrastructure is also being upgraded. Therefore, the Public Works Department and Chicopee Electric Light have worked in tandem with one another to find and deliver the most efficient, accurate and economical metering system to their customers. The Department of Public Works' water meters will send water consumption information over the Electric Light's fiber optic network.

Prior to a City-wide implementation of this technology, a pilot program consisting of electric and water meters will be performed in the area of Horseshoe Drive and the Memorial Drive area, between James Street and Pendleton Avenue. Electric and water meters in the pilot area will be changed out as a part of this process starting in Fall 2018.

ABOUT THE WATER METER READING SYSTEM

How does it work?

- Using wireless radio transmitters, customer meters are read remotely. This data is then transferred into the billing system.
- This system will drastically reduce the need for meter readers to manually gather utility meter readings.

Why is the City installing these meters?

- The meter installation is an upgrade to newer technology that will improve our service to you. Most existing meters in Chicopee have reached their end of service life and under report water usage. The new meters will provide a more accurate recording of consumption and a more cost-effective way of transmitting that consumption data to the Department of Public Works. In addition, this program will improve the City's infrastructure and increase our ability to respond to customer inquiries. Meter readers will no longer need to visit each meter to get consumption data, leaks in the water system or in individual homes or businesses will be identified very quickly, power outages will be identified and responded to faster, and overall billing will become more accurate.

What powers the radio transmitter?

- The radio is a battery-powered device. The expected life of the battery is 20 years, which coincides with the expected life of a residential water meter.

Has this new equipment been tested for accuracy and reliability?

- Yes, this equipment has gone through numerous tests for billing accuracy and system reliability.

Do I need to maintain the meters?

- No. The City of Chicopee will handle all ongoing maintenance of the equipment. Do not tamper with the devices. Do not bang on them or attempt to adjust them. Teach children never to touch or play with utility equipment including the meters and radio transmitters. If you think something is wrong with the equipment, *please call the Department of Public Works at 413-594-3557.*

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- ✓ High water usage and/or water leaks will be brought to your attention quickly and not accumulate over 90 days.
- ✓ You may select to have immediate notification of abnormal water usage.
- ✓ You will not have to be home to get an accurate meter reading and you will not have to mail in a water reading card.
- ✓ Eliminates estimated readings.
- ✓ Provides accurate water usages for all customers.
- ✓ Lowers operational costs to read meters.
- ✓ Usage information data will be transmitted automatically to the DPW four times each day.
- ✓ Customer service representatives will be able to better assist you in understanding your usage trends as they will have detailed information about your water usage. This will help you save water and reduce your water costs.
- ✓ Access the Customer Information Web Portal where you can view details related to your water usage, set usage notification triggers, and view balance information.
- ✓ Provide the City with the ability to transition to monthly billing in the future.

HOW WILL SERVICES BE IMPROVED?

- *Improved* meter reading accuracy
- *Minimized* need to access your property to read your meter
- *Enhanced* customer service by:
 - *Call Resolution Improvement* – billing calls will be handled more quickly due to availability of more frequent meter readings
 - *Leak Detection* – Customers will be notified so leaks can be repaired proactively
 - *Loss Prevention* - We'll have improved ways to detect, and thus prevent, the theft of water and power
 - *Track, Manage, and Control* water and energy use – Customers will have access to up-to date and more detailed consumption information, allowing users to adjust their consumption accordingly

- *Efficient and greener* field services from water, sewer and electric by reducing the number of personnel and trucks in the field

SAFETY & SECURITY

What information will be transmitted?

- The modules transmit meter readings and the meter identification number. Diagnostic information is also transmitted to verify that the meter is operating correctly.

Is my account information secure?

- Yes, only meter readings and meter numbers are transmitted.
- Personal customer information will not be transmitted.
- The system uses technology that was originally developed by the US military for secure communications to keep your information private and secure.

Will the radio transmitter interfere with my television, cordless phone, garage doors or pacemaker?

- No, the radio transmissions occur on a frequency different from those used by television signals, cordless phones, garage doors, and pacemakers.

Are there any potential health concerns with the radio signals?

- Studies made on low-power RF transmissions have revealed no negative health impacts. The meter transmits for less than a minute each day. The transmissions from the device are comparatively of much lower power, lesser duration, and of farther proximity to customers than typical household devices such as cellular or cordless phones, and televisions. Other common household devices that also use low-power radio signals include wireless internet systems, laptop computers, video game consoles, and baby monitors.

Is there anything hazardous inside the equipment?

- No, only ordinary electronics and batteries are inside the equipment.

Is this radio device a listening device used to listen to conversations in my basement or utility room?

- No. This device transmits encoded water meter register readings.

METER REPLACEMENT & INSTALLATION

When will the installations begin taking place?

- Installation of meters as part of the pilot program will begin in Fall 2018. After the pilot program is complete, the City will begin work in small, localized areas. Customers in these areas will receive notification prior to work beginning in their area. The City will travel door-to-door, and door-knock to gain access. If an appointment is needed, the City will leave a door-hanger stating they were in the area, unable to install the water meter and will request the customer call and schedule an appointment.

Can you explain the installation process?

- a. Installation of the new meter takes approximately 30-60 minutes in most cases, with your water service being unavailable for up to 30 minutes that time.
- b. To ensure that the installation is complete, workers will briefly test the new meter.
- c. The installer will clean up the work area to restore to the area original condition.
- d. Installers will take a before and after photo of the installation.
- e. Before temporarily interrupting individual water services, crews will make every effort to ensure that doing so will not impose an undue hardship on the customer.
- f. Before leaving the site, the property owner will be provided information on the status of the visit in the form of a door-hanger receipt. If a property owner is unavailable, the door-hanger will be left on the door. If the door-hanger is exposed to the elements, it will be mailed to the customer. The door-hangers will inform the owner whether the meter was installed, if the meter was unable to be installed and will provide any additional noteworthy comments.
- g. Additionally, the installers have been trained to identify lead services. If a lead service is identified during the meter installation process, the City will assist the homeowners in the removal of the lead service and lead piping. The City understands the potential associated risks with lead services and is providing this value-added service as it strives to continue to provide safe, clean water to the City of Chicopee customers.

Do I need to make an appointment to have my meter installed?

- Installations will occur initially based on door-to-door canvassing if the meter installers are in the neighborhood, but only with your approval. If the installation team is unable to gain access when they visit your home, they will leave the blue door hanger with information on how to schedule an appointment. Available appointments will be at 7:30 AM or 12:30PM. Otherwise, appointments are done on a block basis; Installers will arrive between 8 AM and 11:00 AM or 12:30 PM and 3 PM to complete the install.
- The entire meter replacement process takes approximately 30-60 minutes to complete with a water service interruption of up to 30 minutes. Please be advised some installations may take longer due to piping issues, location of meter, etc.

How long will it take for my meter to be installed?

- Once inside your home, each water meter installation will take approximately 30-60 minutes. In some cases, it might be determined by the City that the structural integrity of the pipe at your foundation wall will prohibit the installation of the new water meter. Should this be the case you will be contacted by the City of Chicopee Department of Public Works on what measures will need to be taken in order to install the new water meter.
- Additionally, there may be some trapped air or slight discoloration in the water line that result from the change out. This will clear up after running your water for a few moments. You may hear some noise as the air exits spigots and fixtures. This is normal.

Will workers need to enter my home to install the new meter?

- Yes, two persons from the City of Chicopee Department of Public Works will need to enter your home. Both workers will have proper identification and will arrive in marked vehicles.

Do I need to do anything to my home or business before you install the new water meter?

- Yes. You need to remove anything within a three (3) foot radius of your water meter and reading device. Your water meter is most likely located in your basement or crawl space, usually along the front wall of your house, where your water service enters from the street. Someone over the age of 18 must be home, and remain home, to allow the installers access to the existing meter.
- To help keep everyone safe, dogs and any other domestic pets will need to be secured during installation.

Do I need to be home for the water meter appointment?

- Yes, or someone 18 or over needs to be home and remain home during the installation process. We cannot enter anyone's home without someone being home. If the installers have been in your area and were unable to changeout your meter, please call the number provided on the blue door-hanger to schedule an appointment. Please do not call until you receive a blue door-hanger notice.

When are appointments normally scheduled?

- If an appointment is needed, appointments are usually scheduled during the hours of 7:30 AM and 2:30 PM Monday through Friday for water meter replacements. Otherwise, appointments are done on a block basis where installers will arrive between 8 AM and 11:00 AM or 12:30 PM and 3 PM to complete the install. If customers are unavailable between those hours, some appointments for after-hours and weekends are available.
- Please note that you cannot schedule your appointment until you receive written notification to make the appointment – this notification will be a blue door-hanger.
- Initially, installations will occur based on door-to-door canvassing if the meter installers are in the neighborhood, but only with your approval.

How long will it take to complete the project?

- The project is scheduled to be completed over 7 to 10 years.

What if I have not received notification to make an appointment?

- The City will track the installation of all meters and will insure your meter is replaced during the changeout process. However, the changeout process will take approximately ten years, therefore your meter may not be replaced for quite some time.

How do I know that the people who come to my house are representing the City as part of this project?

- All City personnel assigned to the project will have a conspicuously displayed picture identification badge.
- All vehicles used by these individuals will also be marked City vehicles.

- Employees without proper identification will not be allowed to work.
- The Chicopee Police Department will also be notified of where the work is taking place prior to installers entering a neighborhood.
- If you ever have any question about the identity of someone who claims to be working on behalf of the City of Chicopee, please call the City of Chicopee Department of Public Works at 413-594-3557 or the Police Department's non-emergency number, 413-594-1700

Will my water service be interrupted?

- Yes, service interruptions will generally last less than a half hour.

OTHER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Why is the City installing new water meters?

- Many of the City's existing water meters have been in service past their useful life. Failed meters result in estimated water usage or under reported water usage. The older meters are not compatible with current meter reading systems. The new meters will transmit the water meter reading directly to the DPW and accurately report your consumption every day.

Is this new system really needed?

- Yes. We strive to provide the best possible customer service, high reliability and billing accuracy. The new technology will help us achieve these goals. As water meters get older they become less accurate and need to be replaced.

Does this mean my bill will be increasing?

- Not necessarily. In some cases, your bill may increase, but only if your current meter is underreporting usage. Presently residents with newer meters are paying for the water they are actually using, while a few residents with older meters are only paying for a fraction of the water. This condition is not fair to all residents. The new system will ensure fairness and equality for all the residents and businesses from this point forward.

Will I be charged for the new meter?

- The meter and installation are provided to the property owner at no charge. If existing plumbing is in disrepair, the owner may incur a cost associated with fixing the plumbing prior to installation.

Will I see a change in my service after the meters are installed?

- The only significant change to your utility service will be that once the system is operating, meter readers will not need to visit your property to collect the meter readings. Service personnel may visit the meter periodically to confirm proper operation or perform routine maintenance. Additionally, through the web portal, customers and customer service staff will have presentations of hourly water usage that will help customers understand their use better and identify how to control costs.

Doesn't the upgrade work require a licensed plumber?

- In some rare instances where modifications to the existing plumbing are needed to change out the water meter, a licensed plumber will be required.

Isn't my water meter on the outside of the home?

- No, water meters are located within the homes to prevent freezing in the winter months. Some homes may be equipped with an outdoor reading device. Installers will be replacing the water meter inside your home and installing a new radio device.

Is this something I have to do?

- Yes, this is a mandatory meter replacement/upgrade. The City of Chicopee requires that all utility customers receive new meters. Customers may option not to have radio reach technology, but those who chose to not have radio read technology will be billed a monthly water usage read fee. Customers with radio read technology will not be billed this opt out fee.

My meter has received the new technology upgrade. Why is a meter reader still taking readings from my meter?

- If you received a new meter after September 2018 your meter is still being read manually it just indicates that we have not completed the network in your area, and we are not yet ready to read your meter remotely. Once we are receiving radio readings from your meter, future readings will be collected remotely by the network.
- A City employee may also need to revisit the meter to perform troubleshooting tasks if any read errors appear.

I just got a new meter. Why is a meter reader still taking readings from my meter?

- If you received a new meter prior to September 2018, the new radio read capability still needs to be installed.

How do you know that my reading is accurate?

- This “state-of-the-art” meter reading technology uses electronic registers to collect the meter readings and a radio to send the data that have proven to be more accurate than visually reading the meter by removing the possibility for human errors. Also, each radio device has a unique identification number that is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique identification number is compared electronically to your account record to ensure that the meter reading received matches the meter assigned to your account.

What will happen to my old water meter and electric meter?

- Your old meters will be taken and stored for 6 months and then recycled. This is done should there be any disagreements regarding prior water or electricity consumption.

After installation of the radio read meter, will a Meter Reader still need access to the property to read my meter? Will I still have to a read my meter myself and report it to City Hall?

- No. The new water meter reading system is automatic and can be read without residents having to report their usage.

Will the meter interfere with my other household appliances such as computer routers, television signal, cordless phones, etc.?

- The meter and transmitter will not adversely affect the stability or performance of home wireless networks.

What if I have more questions about the meter replacement program implementation?

- You can contact the Chicopee Water Department at 413-594-3420 or Department of Public Works at 413-594-3557 Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. You can also email meters@chicopeema.gov for more information.