

General Water Meter Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) and Opt Out Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the City installing water meters?

The State of California and the City of Mt. Shasta have been in severe to exceptional drought for 4 years. The Governor has mandated that all cities reduce their water consumption by 25%. The bottom line is, if we want to manage our water use we have to measure it.

Who pays for the meters, meter reading system, and installation?

The City has obtained a grant to purchase and install the water meters and AMR system that covers about 90% of the costs; the remaining 10% is paid out of the City's existing water capital improvement fund. There is no charge to you to have the meters and AMR system installed. There is also no monthly charge to do the automated monthly read of the water meters.

What type of water meter and meter reading system is being installed?

The new meters, the Sensus iPerl, are guaranteed to be accurate for 20 years, the longest in the industry. The automated meter reading system, the Sensus FlexNet, uses radio frequency signals to transmit the water use information to a Public Works vehicle as it drives down the street during meter reading activities and also provides water leak detection. The City has chosen an AMR radio system that only transmits for 1/10th of one second per month.

Will I have to be home when the meter and AMR system is installed?

In most cases, the meter and AMR system can be installed without the need for a homeowner or business owner to be present. In order for the Contractor to install the meters, each individual service will need to be turned off so the new meter can be installed. This one-time outage will last no more than 4 hours. All customers will get a notice 7 days in advance indicating a three-day window in which the water will be turned off. On the day of the install, customers will be provided no less than 1 hour notice of the shutoff. The Contractor and City will work individually with commercial customers to determine optimal shutoff dates and times.

Is this the same technology as the "Smart Meter" program that many local electric utilities are installing?

No. Some of the controversy that has been raised relating to electric Smart Meters is not relevant to our water meters. The Smart Meters that many electricity utilities are installing (not here in Mt. Shasta) send thousands of meter reads every day to a central processing unit that is connected to the electrical grid or network system. The grid then sends electricity use and real-time rate data back the electrical meter, and allows commercial and residential customers to schedule electrical use activities (like washing dishes or clothes) when electricity use and rates are lower.

Privacy concerns are limited with water meter data because it is only sent once a month and directly to the City in the system we are installing. Fire safety issues associated with the

electrical meters are also eliminated because the water meters are battery powered and not connected to the electric service wiring. In addition, transmission of data from the water meters is only 1/10th of one second per month.

Can I read my water meter myself?

Yes, you can open the water meter lid and read your usage at any time.

Do I have to have a water meter?

All City water purchasers must have a water meter installed.

What does “opt out” mean?

The City is considering an opt-out policy that will unplug or uninstall the radio antenna. Opt-out customers will still get a water meter and be charged for consumption at such time that all other residents are charged for consumption.

Are there costs associated with electing to opt out of the AMR program?

There will be additional monthly charges for those accounts who individually select the more costly manual read process. Those charges have not been determined yet.

Who can opt out of the AMR program? How do I opt out?

The opt-out program would apply to residential customers only; commercial customers will not have an opt-out option. All customers who request to opt out of the AMR program will be required to complete an Opt Out Service Agreement Form should the program be established.

Why do I have to pay to opt out of the AMR program?

Our standard for water meters includes AMR equipment, which has been reviewed and approved by the Mt. Shasta City Council. We determined that the costs for non-standard service should be paid by those customers who choose the non-standard service. The opt-out charges would cover the costs of removing and reconfiguring the AMR equipment and manually collecting meter reads from the non-automated water meters.

Once I opt out, what will change?

After July 1, 2015, we will visit the site and remove the AMR radio module. The antenna for the radio module will stay in the meter box cover. By removing the automated meter reading components, our personnel must visit the property to manually read the meters.

Are other utility companies offering this option?

Yes. We have researched the opt-out practices of other utility companies and monitored events across the country. An opt-out program adopted by the City would follow the best practices that have been developed by other utility providers. The average national opt out participation rate is 0.006%.

Will rates be affected by this program?

No. Costs to manually read meters and do billing will be covered by participants in the opt-out program.

Why do the water meters look the same as they did before the automated equipment was removed?

The same water meters are used to measure consumption. The only difference is the Radio Frequency (RF) transmitting module attached to each meter would be removed; the antenna stays mounted in the meter box cover so we do not have to replace the cover.

Once a customer opts out, will there still be RF in and around their home?

Yes. In today's hi-tech world, RF is emitted from wireless routers, cell phones, microwaves, baby monitors, and etcetera. Additionally, any RF being emitted from communication towers or other meters in the area are in the environment at all times.

Once a customer opts out, can they opt back into automated meter reading?

Yes. If you opt out of the AMR program, you are responsible for the associated fees incurred as discussed above. If you opt out and then change your mind, the fees are not refundable.

Any customer that opts out, but subsequently elects to opt back in, will not incur any charges or fees to have the AMR equipment placed back in service, and the monthly manual meter read fee will stop. Customers may opt back into the AMR program by calling City Hall.