

WSWC-5: RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER LEAK REDUCTION PROGRAMS

Responsible Party: Local Water Provider

Intent: Identify and reduce leaks on the customer side of residential meters to reduce wasted water, surprise increases in water bills, and property damage.

Action Item: Implement programs to assist separately metered residential customers in identifying and repairing leaks in a timely manner.

Sub-Tasks: Each local water provider shall:

1. Adopt a policy providing for a bill reduction credit to any residential customer with an unusually high water bill when the customer demonstrates they timely repaired a leak on the customer side of the meter. Such policy shall be referenced and made available on the local water provider's website and through one or more of the following methods: customer bills, bill inserts, robocalls, emails, or text alerts.
2. Implement one of the following two programs:
 - a. Active participation in a rebate program, offering rebates to customers that install smart leak detection devices. This can be accomplished through enrollment in a District-facilitated rebate program. This program will be managed by District staff until the sunset date of December 31, 2025. Local water providers may create and operate their own rebate program for smart leak detection devices.
 - or
 - b. For systems that use AMI for a significant portion of their residential customer meters, offer a constant consumption notification program, which can be a voluntary, customer-initiated program through a web-based portal or a centrally administered program with periodic notices for AMI customers.

Description and Implementation: This Action Item is focused on reducing leaks on the customer side of the water meter of residential customers with separate utility meters. A leak for the purpose of this Action Item includes, but is not limited to, running toilets, dripping plumbing fixtures, breaks in water service lines and irrigation systems, malfunctioning pool and spa fill lines and equipment, burst pipes in the home, and constant consumption by water filters, humidifiers, and water softeners.

Some local water providers in the District already have policies offering bill reduction credits when a customer can show they had a high water bill attributed to a leak that was repaired in a timely fashion. While these programs are often focused on customer assistance, offering a customer a bill reduction credit for timely repairs also helps reduce the number and duration of leaks. For example, by incentivizing customers with a bill reduction credit, they are more likely to purchase replacement parts or professionally repair the leak. Local water providers remain free to set and determine the details of their policies locally as long as they provide a bill reduction credit, require timely repair of the leak, and are made available on the local water provider's website. Components of a good program typically include clear eligibility guidelines, promotion to reach customers with unusually higher water bills, stated limits on the maximum dollar value or percentage of any discount on the amount in excess of normal use, a standard number of days for what constitutes timely repair, what evidence of the repair must be submitted, and a process for the local water provider to evaluate and improve the program over time based on experience. The frequency of notices via customer bills, bill inserts, robocalls, emails, or text alerts is at the discretion of the local water provider.

Note: Local water providers should consider establishing policy and educating customers on whether they are allowed to install smart leak detection devices on the utility meters or within the meter box. With or without a rebate program, a small group of customers have already started installing smart leak detection devices, so proactively addressing any installation-related concerns is advisable.

A smart leak detection device is a technology that enables a home's occupant to monitor and respond to water usage and/or leaks in real time. As part of the internet of things, these technologies are connected to the internet and can send, and in many cases receive, data and communications. Several types of smart leak detection devices are available in the marketplace, including devices that strap onto the utility meter, devices that strap onto the water service line near where it enters the home, devices that are installed in line with the water service line that contain automatic shut-off valves, and devices that can be placed near pipes and plumbing fixtures that detect moisture following a leak. Given the real-time information, customers can avoid surprise water bills and may be able to avoid or limit property damage caused by leaks.

For utilities that wish to create their own smart leak detector rebate programs, the District can provide technical assistance and convene interested local water providers to assist in the creation of accessible, high-quality rebate programs. Local water providers may set the rebate amount at whatever level they determine is appropriate based on the cost of the technologies, the size of the incentive needed to drive some customers to install them, and the budgets of the local water providers. Local water providers must be able to show that at least some rebates were funded and made publicly available each calendar year. The District encourages funding levels sufficient to meet demand, and the District can recommend, upon request, funding levels and rebate amounts for each local water provider based on the District's experience and research.

Metering technology has advanced greatly over the last 10 years in terms of the accuracy of the measuring devices and the ability to acquire readings. Installation of AMI systems can improve the accuracy of information used to support water management and conservation.

Local water providers using AMI for their residential accounts have the option to create constant consumption notification programs using the hourly meter data they collect. The term "constant consumption" is used here because it is harder to identify leaks with the hourly data from AMI compared to the instantaneous data available from smart leak detection devices. Local water providers may offer customers a web-based portal where customers can choose to sign up for alerts, or they may offer a centrally administered program where local water provider staff periodically review, flag, and notify customers with constant consumption that exceeds a certain threshold level of use for a defined number of hours. Many programs offer customer notifications by text, email, or robocall. Some programs also provide in-person visits for exceptionally high volumes of continuous usage.

Need Assistance? Contact the District at TechnicalAssistance@northgeorgiawater.com or visit our website at www.northgeorgiawater.org/technicalassistance.