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News Release

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Monthly Statements Arrive for City Utility Customers

You asked, we listened! The City's two utility bureaus, Environmental Services and Water, value excellent customer service. In response to customer requests, we are excited to offer an option to pay monthly – rather than quarterly – to the 97% of customers who are eligible.

To keep administrative costs down, the monthly statement option was initially limited to paperless (e-bill) customers when it launched in October 2013. When we heard from some customers that the e-bill requirement was a barrier, we began working to remove it. We committed to removing that requirement before 2015, and beat our deadline, launching the free and voluntary program in November 2014. As of Jan. 27, 2015, 13,122 customers are already signed up.

Monthly statements can help our customers manage their monthly budgets and better understand how City utility charges fit into their overall monthly expenses. Customers receiving monthly statements still have their meters read quarterly, but will receive a statement each month. Those customers continue to pay the same total over a three-month period as those who choose to continue with a quarterly bill, in three installments rather than one.

"This option will allow older adults who wish to pay on a monthly basis but don't have access to electronic billing and payment the ability to do so," said Barbara Bernstein, Interim Executive Director for Elders in Action. "Our clients have asked for this option for years."

"Paying for sewer, stormwater, and water services monthly can help Portlanders manage their expenses right now," said Janice Thompson, the Citizens' Utility Board's consumer advocate for Portland public utility customers. "This is an important option that CUB has been pushing for."

"As Commissioner in charge of the City's two public utilities, good customer service is one of my top priorities," said Commissioner Nick Fish. "By expanding the monthly billing option, we are making it easier for customers to plan and budget for their water, sewer and stormwater services."

To enroll in monthly statements, visit www.portlandoregon.gov/utilitybill. To discuss whether monthly statements are a good fit for you, call the Customer Service Center at 503-823-7770 or visit the Service Center in person at 1120 S.W. Fifth Ave., Portland OR 97204.

Monthly Statements History and Fact Sheet

History of Monthly Statements

You asked, we listened. City utility customers told us that monthly statements would help them to manage their monthly expenses, and we developed this option to meet that need. To limit administrative costs, the City introduced a monthly statement billing option for paperless (e-bill) customers in October 2013.

When we learned that the e-bill requirement was a barrier to customers who wanted to sign up for monthly statements, we worked with staff from several City departments, as well as with our billing company, to expand eligibility. We committed to making this option available before 2015, and launched the free and voluntary program in November 2014. As of Jan. 27, 2015, 13,122 customers are enrolled.

Monthly Statements vs. Monthly Billing

Monthly statements are a great option, helping households manage their monthly budgets and understand how their sewer/stormwater/water charges fit into their monthly expenses. A monthly *statement* is different from a monthly *bill*. When a household chooses monthly statements, their meter continues to be read quarterly, but charges are invoiced monthly. Monthly meter reads, which are not currently available for residential customers, also have their benefits. An automated meter reading system could give hourly data, providing households with more frequent information and allowing them to control their usage and proactively identify household leaks. But upgrading to a new meter system would be expensive – approximately \$40 million. In an effort to meet our customers' desire to pay monthly without incurring this cost, we developed this monthly statement option.

What Will This New Program Cost?

Offering this new program comes with a cost. In its first year, that cost is difficult to predict because we don't know how many customers will choose it. The cost is associated with reaching out to households 12 times a year, compared to just four. Based on an estimate that 10% of households will choose monthly paper statements, we budgeted an additional \$246,300 for printing, paper, envelopes, postage and costs associated with processing and returned mail. One way to keep these program costs down is encouraging households to consider the monthly, paperless, e-bill option.

Who is the Ideal Candidate for Monthly Statements?

The monthly statement option is ideal for customers who can pay a third of their quarterly bill each month, on time. This is especially convenient for customers who also take advantage of City's auto-pay feature. Monthly statements may not be the right option for customers who require greater flexibility in their payment schedule. These customers are better served by quarterly billing, which allows customers to make payment arrangements and request alternate due dates that work better for them. Quarterly billing is also a better option for customers who sometimes fall behind on payments. We are happy to help you choose the right billing option to meet your needs.