



Knowledge On Tap: Billing Frequently Asked Questions

General Billing Questions

Who do I contact if I need assistance with a billing question?

You can contact the City of Columbia’s Customer Care Center several ways.

- In person: First floor of 1339 Main Street (1136 Washington Street) or 3905 Ensor Avenue
- Phone: 803-545-3300 (Answered 24/7)
- Email: CustomerCare@Columbiasc.net
- Online at www.columbiasc.net/customer-care/service-requests

Please note that Customer Care staff can only discuss billing issues with the account holder or someone that the account holder has authorized to discuss the account. If you are not the account holder, the account holder will need to provide a signed statement to Customer Care authorizing staff to discuss the account with you.

How do I read my bill?

The City of Columbia charges its customers **Base Fees** and **Volumetric Fees** for both water and sewer. Your bill adds the base and volumetric fees together to give you your **Water Charges** and **Sewer Charges** separately. Customers inside the City are also charged a **Storm Water Utility Fee** while customers outside the City are charged **Hydrant** and **Fire Fees** in addition to their water and sewer charges.

Example Inside-City Residential Bill Detail

CHARGE DESCRIPTION	SERVICE PERIOD	DAYS OF SERVICE	METER NUMBER	PREVIOUS READING	PRESENT READING	CONSUMPTION / UNITS	CONSUMPTION 1 YEAR AGO	CHARGE
Residential Water		31	12345678	221	229	8	8	
Residential Sewer		31						
Storm Water		31				0		
Total New Charges								

The City provides an online residential bill estimator that will show you how a typical residential bill is calculated. You can find it here: www.columbiasc.net/customer-care/estimator.

Follow the on-screen instructions to indicate the type of residential bill you have and type in the consumption units from your bill. In the example above, this amount is 8. The estimator will give a breakdown of the charges for a typical bill. If you have any questions or if your bill is not the same as what the online bill estimator is reporting, you can contact 803-545-3300 and speak to a Customer Care representative.

Please note, the estimator will not include credits, payment plans, donations, or other fees that are not part of a “typical” residential bill. It also does not estimate commercial bills or residential bills using more than 100 units (10,000 cubic feet).

Where do I find the latest Water & Sewer rates?

The latest water and sewer rates are published here:

www.columbiasc.net/customer-care/utility-billing/water-sewer-rates

**Customer Care Center | 1336 Washington Square
(803) 545-3300 | CustomerCare@ColumbiaSC.Net**

What are my payment options?

See www.columbiasc.net/customer-care/utility-billing/payment-options for specific payment options.

For bills that are current, you can make payments by:

- Mailing-in
- Walking-in
- Bank draft (must be set up)
- Drive-thru
- Online*
- Phone*
- Night deposit drop box

Bills that are past due can be paid by one of the following:

- Mail-in
- Walking-in
- Online*
- Phone* (2 business days to update records)
- Night deposit drop box (will not post until the next business day)

* Service fees may apply.

If you need to pay a bill and are concerned about having your service shut off, visit one of the two City payment centers on the first floor of 1339 Main Street (1136 Washington Street) or 3905 Ensor Avenue.

What if I have trouble paying my bill?

Contact the Cooperative Ministry at 799-3853 or the Salvation Army at 462-4240 or 765-0260. They may be able to provide assistance.

Account Set-up

How do I set up new service?

You will need to submit a signed Water Service Contract Form then speak with a Customer Care representative. There is also a \$30.00 New Account Fee and a \$15.00 Connection Fee that will be added to your first bill.

Visit www.columbiasc.net/customer-care/utility-billing/new-service for details.

How do I transfer service?

All past due balances must be zero (0) before you can request to transfer service. Contact Customer Care to request a transfer of service. There is also a \$30.00 New Account Fee and a \$15.00 Connection Fee that will be added to your first bill.

Visit www.columbiasc.net/customer-care/utility-billing/transfer-service for details.

How do I discontinue service?

To arrange to discontinue water service, call our Customer Service Department at (803) 545-3300. Only the account holder will be allowed to terminate service. The last four five digits of the social security number must match the account information or the request will not be processed.

The account holder will need to fill out a Disconnect Form. All final readings will be taken within five business days of the termination effective date, and the account holder will be responsible for the final bill.

Visit www.columbiasc.net/customer-care/utility-billing/discontinue-service for details.

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I think I have service, but I did not receive a bill. What should I do?

All customers receive a water bill each **month**. If you do not receive a monthly bill, you must contact Customer Care immediately at (803) 545-3300. Failure to receive a bill does not relieve the customer of the obligation for payment nor from the consequences of non-payment.

Estimated Bills

I received a bill this month, but it says "Estimated." What does that mean?

When a meter reader cannot access your meter or cannot see the numbers on your meter, the bill for that month will be based on an estimated use. Estimated use is based off of your average past usage. The City will continue using an estimated reading until the meter reader is able to take a reading.

Why couldn't the meter reader get to my meter?

Common reasons a meter reader cannot access meters are when it is:

- Behind a locked gate
- In a yard with a dog or animal of concern
- Covered by debris, trash, vegetation, a vehicle, or something else.

Do meter readers ever skip meters that they can access?

Our meter routes are designed so that every meter should be read for each monthly bill. Meter readers only skip meters if something is blocking them from safely accessing a meter. If you believe your meter is accessible but you received an estimated bill, call 803-545-3300. The Customer Care representative will arrange to have someone from Water Distribution explain why your meter was not read for that month. If you still have concerns, we can arrange to have someone from Water Distribution meet you at the meter to explain the issue.

What can I do to help the meter reader access my meter?

First, know where your water meter is. Then, make sure you do not cover it with yard waste, trash, vehicles, or anything else. Finally, make sure you have not locked it behind a gate or left an animal that might cause the meter reader concern in the yard with the meter.

If you believe your meter is accessible but you received an estimated bill, call 803-545-3300. The Customer Care representative will arrange to have someone from Water Distribution explain why your meter was not read for that month. If you still have concerns, we can arrange to have someone from Water Distribution meet you at the meter to explain the issue.

The meter is my property. I have put a lock on it to keep the meter readers from accessing it.

Actually, the meter is the property of the City of Columbia. When you sign an agreement to have access to City of Columbia water, you agree to allow our meter readers to safely access the meter in order to bill you for your water use. Any attempts to purposefully lock the meter, block access to the meter, or vandalize the meter could be grounds for having your water service cut off. Furthermore, the City may bill you for any efforts to repair the tap if you have tampered with the meter.

How are estimated bills calculated?

If the customer has at least 3 months of use on record, the average of this use, up to a year, will be the estimated use. Past use is based on the customer, not the property. Therefore, if a customer has recently moved and transferred service, the average use may include use from their previous residence.

In the example to the right, a customer lives in Property A for 6 months before moving to Property B and transferring their service. After 3 months living at Property B, the customer receives an estimated bill. Even though the average use at Property B is 9, the estimated bill would be based on up to 12 months of the customer’s history. In this case that includes the previous 6 months of use. The estimated bill would be based on 8 units, the 9 month average for this customer.

Month	Residence	Actual Use	Estimated Use
January	Property A	7	
February	Property A	7	
March	Property A	8	
April	Property A	7	
May	Property A	8	
June	Property A	8	
July	Moved to Property B	9	
August	Property B	9	
September	Property B	9	
Average		8	
October	Property B		8

What if I don’t use the average amount while my bill was being estimated? (i.e. using more or less water than average)

Once a meter reader is able to access your meter and take a reading, the City will be able to tell how much water you actually used during the time your bill was being estimated. If you used more water than was estimated, that additional usage will show up as a higher meter reading the next time your meter is read, and you may see a larger than normal bill. If you used less water than was estimated, the reduced usage will show up as a lower meter reading the next time your meter is read, and you may see a lower than normal bill.