

FAQ'S ABOUT NEW WATER METERS FOR BIG FLATS CUSTOMERS

1. Why is my water meter being replaced?

Water meters and their registers often lose accuracy as they age. Therefore, they must be replaced every 15 years. In addition, the new system will include new water meter technology that will save labor time, ensure accuracy and minimize the need for utility employees to go on the private property.

2. How does the new radio-read device work?

The meters transmit a radio signal containing a meter number and a meter reading that can be picked up by a radio receiver in our Town vehicle. The meter reading from that transmission is used to generate a water bill. This transmission allows us to capture readings as we drive by and on-demand should special reading be required at any time. The transmission default interval is every 6 hours. Each transmission includes the last 24 hours of 15 minute interval data in reverse order to assure data accuracy.

3. Where is my water meter located?

Most water meters are located about three feet off the floor in the basement of your home. It is usually located on the wall facing the street. Water meters can sometimes be found in crawl spaces, closets or utility rooms in homes without a basement. The meter is not located outside. If you have a basement that has been finished, occasionally meters have been placed behind walls, in cabinets or other remodeled areas. We ask that you make sure the area around the meter is clear of obstacles so the installers can get in and out on a timely basis.

4. What does my meter look like?

Your current water meter is a device with a round face attached on each side to your water pipes. The face has dials and the numbers on the dial read like a car odometer. Here is a picture of a new residential meter:



5. What exactly will be installed at my property?

Your existing water meter will be replaced with a new water meter that contains a radio transmission device. It transmits the reading and a unique ID from the meter to a receiver that the meter reading staff uses.

6. Does my meter have to be exchanged?

Yes. The new meter is required for future billing.

7. What if I don't want my meter changed?

This is not an option; all meters will be changed.

8. How much will the new meter cost me?

There is no charge to install the new meters. The new meters are part of a Capital project. The Water Department has secured a BAN to pay for the project. The cost of repaying this BAN will be paid for via a line item on your taxes starting in 2017. Each year we will be paying an amount towards principal and interest. The total payment will be divided by number of Special District Units. Before the first payment is due the property owner will receive a letter giving an estimate of what 1 Unit Charge will be. There will also be a Public Hearing in the October before the tax bills are issued. We have used this method in the Town for all our Capital Projects.

9. Do installers need to come inside my house?

Yes, the water meter is located inside the home.

10. What will they do inside my house?

Installers will remove the old meter, install the new meter and clean up after themselves. *Installers will have you sign acknowledging that the new meter has been installed, and provide you with an emergency phone number in the event you have questions or concerns after the installation.*

11. Do I have to be present for the installation?

For your peace of mind, we require that an adult be present during the installation. The installer will not enter your home unless authorized to do so by someone 18 years old or older. The installer will not enter your home if your children are alone.

12. What if I am a tenant and do not own this property?

If you are a tenant, you will be asked to provide the installer with access to the meter. We also ask that you notify the owner of the property about the notification letter you received.

13. I'm an owner and have tenants, but I do not reside at the property. What should I do?

If you have tenants but do not reside on your property, you are responsible for calling the installer for an appointment and for providing access to the meter. In some cases the property owner will be the one notified of the installation. It depends on who pays the water bill. So if you are an owner who does not live on the property but pays the water bill you will receive a letter and you will have to contact your tenants and get an appointment set up.

14. Who will install the new system?

The Town of Big Flats has contracted with National Metering Services to install the new meters. The firm was selected via competitive bidding. All National Metering Services installers have completed training and background checks and will have photo identification, wear identifiable uniforms and drive marked vehicles.

15. When will the new meter be installed in my home?

You will be notified as this information becomes available.

16. What hours can you offer me?

You will be notified as this information becomes available.

17. What if I need to reschedule and appointment?

You will be notified as this information becomes available.

18. When will this work be performed?

You will be notified as this information becomes available.

19. I own a business. Whom do I call to schedule an appointment?

The procedures for small commercial and residential water meters will be the same for scheduling purposes. Larger meters will require additional time with installers working to limit interruption of services.

20. How long does it take to install the service?

A typical residential installation will take less than 30 minutes, depending on how easily we can access your water meter. We ask that you please be at home during the scheduled time. For large commercial meters, significantly more time may be needed.

21. How do I know who is authorized to do the work?

The Town of Big Flats has contracted with National Metering Services to conduct this service. They will be driving marked vehicles, wearing photo identification and wearing uniforms.

22. Will my water service be interrupted during the installation?

The installer will turn off the water on either side of your old meter during the installation. A typical installation should take 30 minutes and the water will be turned back on when complete.

23. What if the valves won't work or a valve is broken during installation?

The installers can freeze the inlet pipe long enough to replace the meter. If the water needs to be turned off at the curb box, this may involve rescheduling the appointment. If the valve is broken by our installer, it will be replaced.

24. May I change the valves while the water is off?

No.

25. How much room do installers need?

If possible, a 3' X 3' area.

26. What if there is something in front of or blocking the meter?

Please plan to have clear access to the meter when the installer arrives. The water meter is the property of the Town of Big Flats and homeowners are obligated to provide clear and unobstructed access to the water meter. If there are boxes or stored items in the way, these items must be cleared prior to the arrival of the meter installer. The installer is not allowed to move your personal items and this may delay the installation process. If for any reason, the water meter has been covered by drywall or paneling, it is the homeowner's responsibility to ensure that the meter is accessible. It is your responsibility to make sure that the meter is completely accessible and the area is well lit.

27. What if there is a leak at the meter or any other problem after the meter is replaced?

The installer will explain procedures for problems prior to leaving a residence. You will be provided with an emergency phone number to call should any problems arise.

28. Can I cover up my meter after the install?

The meter needs to be accessible at any time. If you have done renovation work, your meter still needs to be accessible. This could be an access panel or other means of accessing it.

29. Is there any special care or maintenance that I need to do to my new meter?

No, your meter does not require any maintenance by the homeowner. However, you should be careful not to damage the meter or allow temperatures in your basement to drop to levels that would freeze the meter during the winter months. Be especially careful of your meter freezing if you have renovated and your meter is now behind a wall or panel. Some meters are in crawlspaces and you must take steps to prevent them from freezing. You will be charged for replacing the meter if it should freeze or be damaged. You will also be charged any water metered even if the water is due to a frozen/broken meter.

30. How will this affect my service?

There will be interruption of service for a few minutes during the change.

31. When was the last utility-wide meter replacement project?

Most meters were replaced in the late 1990's, early 2000's.

32. Will I pay more for water because of the change?

Your water rate will not change at the time the new meter is installed. Any future water rate increases/decreases will be the result of budgeting decisions.

33. Does this mean my bill will be increasing?

Not necessarily. In some cases, your bill may increase, but only if your current meter is under- registering usage.

34. What will be the timeframe for future bills?

We will continue to bill as we normally do. We may be a few days past normal but we will strive to keep on our schedule.

35. How accurate are the readings from the radio transmitter?

Meter readings obtained over radio frequency transmissions are 100 percent accurate.

36. How often will you read my meter?

Your meter will be read at the same interval as it is now.

37. What if I need a meter reading between regular readings?

You can take a reading of your meter yourself at any time.

38. What if I disagree with the reading?

You can take a reading of your meter at any time to compare to the bill.

39. Do the new meters have any other benefits for me?

Yes! We'll eliminate the need for manually reading meters. Accuracy will improve. Leaks will be detected sooner. In addition to speed and reliability, we won't have to enter your home, except for periodic maintenance or replacement of system components, when needed. Physical reads at your residence will not be required.

40. How is this project being funded?

Funding for this project was obtained by a low-interest BAN acquired by the Town of Big Flats.

41. How secure is the data/information that will be transmitted?

Because of the equipment and frequencies being used, the information would be extremely difficult for unauthorized acquisition or hacking.

42. Will I be able to read my own meter?

Yes, the new meters can be read manually.

43. What if we have a leak after the meter is installed?

The installers will make every effort to dispatch service personnel as quickly as possible to determine the cause of the leak and to take appropriate action. When your meter is installed, you will receive a phone number to call if there are any concerns or emergencies regarding the meter.

44. How do I know that you have my reading and not someone else's?

Each radio frequency device has a unique identification number, which is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique identification number is compared to your account record to ensure that there is a match.

45. Is there a hazard from the radio transmitter in my home?

Master Meter, the manufacturer, states the radio devices operate under the purview of FCC Par 15.247 regulations.

46. Is there anything hazardous inside the equipment?

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

47. Will the radio interfere with my television, cordless phone or pacemaker?

No, you will not see interference with your television reception, phone or pacemaker. The transmitter utilizes proprietary transmission technologies to minimize any potential for RF interference from other unrelated devices.

48. Does this system use a land phone line to monitor and transmit the reading?

No, this equipment uses a radio transmitter to send the information to an employee driving by with a receiver.

49. Is this system monitoring how many people are in my house?

No, this equipment does not monitor how many people are in the house or any personal activity. It is only capable of collecting the reading from the water meter and transmitting it to the receiver.

50. Why did you choose the new radio-read meters?

The new meters will eliminate estimated meter readings caused by lack of access to the reading box on the house. The new, drive-by system is more efficient, saving labor costs in both meter reading and billing. Meter readers no longer need to walk door-to-door for each meter. With actual meter readings, bills no longer have to be adjusted as they are with estimated readings. We can also download meter information if we suspect a leak.

51. How do the radio-read meters transmit?

As the name implies, radio-read meters transmit data using the same airwaves as your AM or FM radio, only on a different frequency. The radio-read meters operate within the 902-928 MHz frequency band. This spectrum is governed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) CFR part 15, with which the meters are in full compliance.

52. What about other types of meter reading devices that can transmit data over radio frequency waves?

Counting gas, electricity and water meter reading devices across the country, the number of 900 MHz radio devices deployed in residences total more than 100 million.

53. Is there any health hazards associated with this kind of technology?

According to the Federal Communications Commission, the Electric Power Research Institute, and the World Health Organization, radio frequency signals produced by smart meters or other such wireless networks have shown no occurrences of adverse long-or short-term health effects. The WHO's conclusion is that: "Considering the very low exposure levels and research results collected to date, there is no convincing scientific evidence that the weak RF signals from base stations and wireless networks cause adverse health effects." <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/emf/>

54. Where can I find out more information on the water meters?

To find out more about the Master Meter meters being installed, please visit www.mastermeter.com

55. Where can I find more information on radio frequency?

Federal Communications Commission Radio Frequency Safety

Occupational Safety and Health Administration OSHA Report

World Health Organization

WHO Electromagnetic Field Information WHO Report on EMF Health Effects

Thank you for your cooperation during this project.

Please feel free to call or email the Big Flats Water Department

for any other questions that may arise.

607-562-8443, ext 227 or 228 or pkowulich@bigflatsny.gov