

Back Billing – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is an estimated bill?

A bill is estimated when we are not able to get an actual meter reading. This could be due to a meter that's damaged, isn't transmitting data, or is inaccessible due to surrounding debris or vegetation. An estimated bill is based on the most recent water-use records for your account. However, if you had a leak or used more water during the summer months, that would not be reflected in the estimated bill you receive.

Q: How can I tell if my bill is estimated?

Your bill will say "this is an estimated reading" right below the amount due on the left hand side. If your bill is marked estimated for more than two months in a row, please consider contacting the Department of Water Management through Durham One Call at (919) 560-1200.

Q: How are estimated bills calculated?

Staff generally review six prior months' usage to determine the estimated usage for your account and then apply the established water and sewer rates.

Q: Do I have to pay a bill that is estimated?

You are responsible for paying your bill every month whether it's based on an actual meter reading or an estimate. The Department of Water Management has more than 95,000 customers. With that many meters to read, a small number each month may have issues. Rather than hold the bill for the next cycle, we send an estimated bill until the issue is resolved. This way, your estimated bill reflects your normal usage and you are not caught off-guard the following month with a double bill.

Q: I already paid bills without noticing they were estimated bills. Now I am being billed for more. Do I have to pay that, too?

Sometimes a customer uses more water than estimated, sometimes less. Even when we can't access your meter, it keeps recording water use. At this point, we have reviewed the meter readings and your actual records and verified that you used more water than we estimated. What you see on your bill is a charge for that water. Yes, you are required to make payment in full.

Q: How far back are you allowed to retroactively bill me?

Based on City Council's recommendation in response to this event, you will not be retroactively billed beyond a six-month period. This recommendation applies only to cases when the City is considered responsible.

Q: How do you calculate the back-billed amount to make sure that I have not been overcharged?

Your water meter measures how much water you use. Even if the readings aren't being transmitted properly, the meter continues to measure usage. We review those measurements, compare the actual water used to the amount paid for through estimated billing, and charge the difference.

Q: How should I respond to this particular back-billing event?

If our records indicate you still owe for water used during the estimated period, you are responsible for payment for only six months of estimated bills. If you would like to arrange a payment plan or request information about agencies that provide financial assistance to our customers, please contact us at 919-560-1200. The Durham County Department of Social Services handles the City's Water Hardship Fund for residential customers who need help paying their water and sewer bills. You can call 919-560-8000 for more information.

Q: What is the Department of Water Management doing to keep this from happening again?

We are improving our processes and procedures. This includes keeping track of water meters that aren't transmitting actual readings and repairing them before customers receive estimated bills for long periods of time. We are also retraining our staff to communicate in a timely manner with customers who have concerns.

Q: How do I contact Customer Billing staff if I have a question about the amount due and how it was calculated?

You can submit a service request through our online portal via the Durham One Call Page on the City's website at <https://durhamnc.gov/1439/Durham-One-Call>. Click on the "Place a Request" button; scroll down to "Water Management" on the left hand box and click; then select the "Miscellaneous Water Billing Questions" option, complete the form with your address, account number, and question; hit "Submit." You can expect to hear back within 3 business days.