



## Voluntary Metering Program

### Frequently Asked Questions



#### What is the Voluntary Metering Program?

The Voluntary Metering Program (VMP) is a **FREE** water meter installation service offering City of Bellingham single-family residential water customers the opportunity to convert an existing flat-rate account to a metered water account.

#### Why should I participate in the VMP?

A metered water service accurately reflects a home's water consumption and rewards those who practice good water conservation habits with a potentially lower water bill. The Washington State Department of Health has mandated that water meters be installed on all single-family residential homes by 2017.

#### What happens if I choose not to participate in the Voluntary Metering Program?

If you choose not to participate in the VMP at this time, you will continue to pay a flat rate. However, by 2017, all single-family residential homes will have a water meter installed on their service. The City Council adopted Resolution 2008-26 outlining a Water Metering Schedule up to 2017, but the exact date of installation at your service may not yet be determined. The City will be reviewing its strategic installation plan on an ongoing basis.

#### How much money will I save on my water bill by switching to a metered rate?

That is entirely up to YOU! Use less, pay less. Fixtures such as your toilet, washing machine, faucets and showerhead(s) all impact how much water is used in the home. Outdoor water use is also a contributing factor. Through changes in water use habits and/or by replacing high-water-use fixtures with more efficient ones, your water consumption and water bill can be reduced significantly. See [www.cob.org/utilities](http://www.cob.org/utilities) for:

- *Residential Water Consumption Calculator* – Click on “Water” and use the calculator to estimate household water use and comparison of what you might pay on a metered versus a non-metered water service.
- *Water Conservation Program web page* – Link to the Water Conservation Program page for tips and opportunities to save on indoor and outdoor water use. You can also email [waterconservation@cob.org](mailto:waterconservation@cob.org) or call Public Works at 778-7700 with questions.
- *Current water rates* – Click on “Utility Billing” to find current metered and non-metered water utility rates.

#### What are the metered and non-metered water rates for single-family residential customers?

Find information about utility billing, rates, water conservation, the Voluntary Metering Program and other water-related issues at [www.cob.org/utilities](http://www.cob.org/utilities).

#### Will the sewer portion of my water bill change?

No. At this time, single-family residential sewer rates are not based on metered water usage.

#### Can I revert to a flat-rate water service if I find I'm not saving any money?

No. You may not switch back to a flat-rate water bill once you have chosen to have a meter installed or are located in an area where meters are scheduled to be installed. The Voluntary Metering Program is designed to give you the benefits of a metered account prior to the scheduled time you will receive one. The Washington State Department of Health has mandated that meters be installed on all water customers by 2017. The Voluntary Metering Program is assisting in meeting compliance with this law. Your water service will eventually be metered; it is up to you if you'd like the benefit now or later.

#### How do I sign up to have a water meter installed?

Property owners can request a free meter installation by submitting a Voluntary Metering Program application.

- Online application: See Voluntary Water Metering Program at [www.cob.org/utilities](http://www.cob.org/utilities).

- Paper application: Applications are available at City Hall (210 Lottie Street) in the Permit Center and in the Finance Department office or at Public Works Operations (2221 Pacific Street) in Bellingham. You may also print a copy of the application available through the “Voluntary Water Metering Program” link at [www.cob.org/utilities](http://www.cob.org/utilities). Completed applications can be returned to any of the pick-up locations, faxed to the number on the application form, or mailed to 2221 Pacific Street, Bellingham, WA 98229. The application must be signed by the property owner. Applications are processed in the order received, and applicants can expect to have a water meter installed within two billing cycles.

### What size of a water meter will be installed at my home?

A 5/8” meter is installed on most single-family residential homes.

### What does the meter look like?



### What is the procedure for the meter installation?

1. Water meters are installed in the order application is received. The water meter will be installed within two billing cycles.
2. Some homes already have a water meter assembly box installed and utilities will not need to be located. A crew will install your meter into the existing assembly box and will notify you via a door hanger that your meter was installed. If you do not already have a meter assembly box, underground utilities near your property will be located. Utility locates near your property indicate that your water meter will be installed within 48 hours to 1 week. Locations are indicated by different colors of spray paint near your property and in the right-of-way. The blue stake and white paint indicate where water crew personnel will be digging to install the water meter box. The meter box is 26” long x 18” wide x 20” deep. If any structure or landscaping is located where the stake is placed, it will need to be removed promptly so that personnel can install the water meter. The homeowner is responsible for removing and installing any structures or plantings.
3. On the day of installation, water to the home will be shut-off for approximately 1-2 hours. The total installation will take approximately 3-4 hours depending on the site. When a meter assembly box is already present, the installation process is quicker.
4. Once installation is completed, water consumption will be read on a scheduled reading date, and the homeowner is billed accordingly for a metered water rate.

### I have some landscaping where the meter is to be installed. What happens with that?

Any plants, trees, shrubs, flower beds, fencing, or other structures will need to be removed if located where the water meter is to be installed, indicated by a blue stake and white paint. The size of the meter box being installed is 26” long x 18” wide x 20” deep. If you have extensive landscaping or structures that you are concerned about whether or not to relocate, you can call Public Works at 778-7700 to discuss. Relocation of such items will likely need to take place in order to ensure that the meter box is installed properly and not obstructed. Re-installing the plants that were removed to accommodate the meter box is the responsibility of the homeowner.

### Do I need to be home while the installation is taking place? Will my water be shut-off?

It is not necessary to be present when the water meter installation is taking place. However, the water to your home will need to be shut-off for approximately 1-2 hours while water crew personnel complete the installation.