

Use Water Wisely – Control Water Costs

The Milwaukee Water Works provides fresh, safe drinking water at a lower cost compared to other drinking water utilities in Wisconsin and many others in the United States. But water leaks waste tremendous amounts of water and can add up to cost you a lot of money.

As your drinking water provider, we work to control costs by repairing leaks in our treatment and distribution systems. Leaks that occur inside homes and businesses are the responsibility of the property owner. Find and fix all leaks to save money, control water costs, and conserve our water resource.

Check for leaks

Check for leaks throughout your home at least once every season of the year.

- Leaks can be loud or silent.
- Leaks can be constant, like a dripping faucet or showerhead, or a noisy, running toilet.
- Leaks may occur only every now and then, only at certain times, or after a certain amount of use of an appliance. You may tighten a faucet footing but it could loosen with time and use and then leak again. The dishwasher may leak all over the floor only every now and then. The toilet may only run on weekends or may “ghost flush” especially in the middle of the night when no one flushed it.

You may have a plumbing leak if:

- You hear the continuous sound of water (like a toilet running) when nothing is turned on.
- Your water bill escalates over a period of months.
- Walls or floors have wet, spongy, moist, or discolored areas when nothing has been spilled.
- You smell foul odors coming from floors or walls near drains or sewers.
- The building foundation cracks, vegetation grows unevenly, or earth shifts for no apparent reason.
- You see water bubbling up in your front yard.

Sewer charges are based on how much water you use.

The City of Milwaukee Local Sewerage Charge and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) Sewer Treatment Usage Charge are based on the amount of water that passes through your water meter, whether you consumed the water or it dripped, leaked, and was wasted down the drain. A toilet that runs all day and night will waste about 200 gallons per day, at an additional cost of over \$400.00 per year.

Check your Municipal Services Bill each quarter for water use and compare it to past usage. Water use is measured in units called Ccf, which stands for 100 cubic feet. One Ccf equals 748 gallons of water. To see a graph showing your water use, go to www.milwaukee.gov/water>Account Information and click on Consumption History.

The typical person in Milwaukee uses 10 Ccf of water per quarter. Multiply 10 by the number of people in your household to give you the number of Ccf of water used in one quarter (for example, 4 people x 10 = 40 Ccf). If you are using much more than 10 Ccf per person per quarter, you may have water leaks. Large fluctuations in use could indicate leaks. Expect increased water use during warm weather months if you water your lawn and garden, fill a pool, or wash your car frequently.

Familiarize yourself with your home water system

Find the master water supply valve

Find the master water supply shut-off valve that controls water flow into the building. Use the valve only in an emergency. Find the valve where the water supply enters the home, such as the foundation near the street side of the building, at the water meter, near the clothes washer hookup, or near the water heater.

Find and read the water meter

The water meter is typically located in the basement on the street side of the building. The water meter is the best detective for leaks. The meter accurately measures the amount of water that flows into the house whether it is used or wasted. The meter records water use just as a car's odometer records mileage. Meters are never reset. The meter is the only part of the building plumbing that is owned and maintained by the Milwaukee Water Works. All other plumbing repair, of valves and pipes, including the service lateral from the street curb valve, is the responsibility of the property owner.

Use the water meter to test for leaks

1. The dial face of the meter has a small blue leak detector wheel that spins to record smaller volumes of water that are typical of leaks.
2. Turn off all water inside and outside of the house. Make sure no one uses water or flushes the toilet while you make this test.
3. Go to the water meter and lift the lid. Look at the small blue wheel on the dial face. If it is moving slowly or spinning fast, you probably have water leaks. Water is moving through the meter, registering on the dial, and is being used or is leaking somewhere inside or outside of the house. Or, not all water was turned off, such as the water supplying the ice maker.

Use Water Wisely in the bathroom

- Check sink and tub faucets, showerheads, and toilets for drips or leaks every week.
- Most leaky showerheads can be fixed by making sure they are screwed in tightly. Wrap the showerhead connection in pipe tape, available at hardware stores, and use a wrench to tighten it. While making the showerhead repair with pipe tape, check to see if the washer or O-ring inside the showerhead is worn out and should be replaced.
- Decrease the amount of water used per flush. Put a water displacement device inside every toilet tank. Make them from plastic water bottles filled with pebbles. Do not put bricks in the toilet tank - they can dissolve and clog the siphon jets.

Fix a leaking faucet

The most common cause of faucet leaks is a worn washer. Here is how to replace a washer:

1. Turn off the water at the nearest shut-off valve.
2. Loosen the cap nut by turning it counterclockwise. Turn the faucet handle in the direction of opening until it comes off.
3. Lift out the faucet assembly.
4. Unscrew the brass setscrew that holds the washer in place.
5. Remove the old washer. Flush or wipe the cup clean.
6. Select the proper size replacement washer and insert it. Then reinsert the set screw.
7. Put the faucet assembly back in place. Turn the faucet handle as far as possible to close it. Then loosen the handle slightly.
8. Replace the cap nut. Close the faucet. Turn the water back on at the shut-off valve.

Find and fix a leaking toilet

Toilets are notorious for silent or loud water leaks, and “ghost flushing” when no one has flushed the toilet.

- Lift the lid off the back tank and put a few drops of food coloring or a dye tablet in the tank. Wait 15 minutes without flushing. If colored water appears in the bowl, you have a leak. The flush valve ball probably needs to be replaced.
- If the flush valve ball is not worn, check to see whether it fits into the flush valve snugly. If this valve is corroded, clean it. Then, if the ball still will not seat properly, straighten the guide wire and make sure it is not catching anything. If it still leaks, replace the flush valve ball. Newer toilets have a chain and stopper ball instead of the guide wire and flush valve ball.
- Sprinkle a small amount of talcum powder on top of the water in the tank. If this powder moves toward the overflow tube, you probably have an overflow leak. Gently bend the float arm down to shut off the valve before water spills into the tube.
- If your toilet whistles, whines or will not shut off after adjusting the float ball, you may need a new ball cock assembly. Hardware stores sell replacement and conservation kits.
- If your toilet continues to leak, call a professional plumber for assistance.

Use Water Wisely in the kitchen and laundry

- One of the most common areas for water loss is the kitchen sink area. Check under cupboards once a week for wet spots or bowed cabinetry.
- After a meal, scrape used plates with a utensil instead of rinsing them off with running water.
- Don't continuously run water in the sink. Hand wash dishes in a sink full of soapy water; rinse all at once. Soak hard-to-clean pans overnight.
- Run only full loads in your dishwasher and clothes washer.
- Fill a pitcher or other container with water and store it in the refrigerator so you have cold drinking water ready when you want it.

Use Water Wisely in the basement

- Wrap exposed indoor and outdoor pipes to prevent freezing and breakage in very cold weather.
- To find information about preventing pipes and the water meter from freezing, visit www.milwaukee.gov/water > Customer Service > FAQs > How To

Use Water Wisely outside

- Walk around your property once a week during warm weather to look for spongy or mushy ground where broken pipes might be hidden.
- Check sprinklers for jammed or malfunctioning heads.
- Check your garden hose and spigot connection for leaks. Replace the nylon or rubber hose washer and make a tight connection to the spigot using pipe tape and a wrench.
- Check to see that the timer on the irrigation system works properly and is set correctly.
- Water lawns during the coolest times of the day, before 10:00 a.m. or in the evening.
- Sprinklers and drip irrigation systems can be more accurate and efficient than hand watering.
- Deep-soak lawns long enough for water to seep down to the roots. Water deeper and less often.
- Dig basins around individual plants to prevent runoff while watering.
- Put mulch around trees and plants to slow moisture evaporation.
- Landscape with native plants that use little water. Plant a rain garden. Recycle rain water with a rain barrel.
- Pull weeds -- they steal water from desirable plants.
- Sweep driveways, sidewalks, and steps rather than use the hose to spray them.
- Use a commercial car wash.

Use Water Wisely in hot tubs and pools

- Check regularly for leaks. A leak in the hot tub or pool area can waste 1,000 gallons or more per day. Watch for sinking ground around the hot tub or pool.
- Pay particular attention to your automatic water filler. If it's faulty, your water bill will increase.
- Keep track of the amount of chemicals you normally use. An increase in use could indicate a leak.
- Your automatic filler should not continually release water.
- Use a pool/spa cover to cut down on water loss (and heating costs) caused by evaporation.

Look for the WaterSense and the Energy Star® Labels

- Install flow restrictors, faucet aerators, low-flow showerheads, and other water-saving devices. You can find them at a hardware store.
- When you replace a plumbing fixture, look for the EPA WaterSense label. These WaterSense-labeled toilets, faucets, and showerheads have been independently tested and certified to save water.
- Energy Star®-labeled appliances save money by using less electricity and water than other appliances. The Energy Star® may be found on clothes washers, refrigerators, and dishwashers.

Resources

- Most leaks are easy to repair with parts from a hardware store. Or, call a professional plumber.
- Look for Use Water Wisely printable worksheets at www.milwaukee.gov/water. Call or visit our Customer Service Center to receive a worksheet and toilet leak detection dye tablet packet; Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., (414) 286-2830. TDD (414) 286-2025. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 N. Broadway, 4th floor.
- Customer Service non-emergency email: watwebcs@milwaukee.gov
- EPA guide to fixing leaks at home: www.epa.gov/watersense/our_water/howto.html

Use el agua racionalmente y controle los costos del suministro. Para una explicación en español, por favor llame al (414) 286-2830.

Repare goteos y fugas alrededor del hogar (en español)
<http://www.epa.gov/watersense/resources/como.html>

The Milwaukee Water Works is a national leader in providing high quality, reliable water and in monitoring water quality to make sure it is safe and healthful.

Clean Wisconsin is an environmental advocacy organization which protects Wisconsin's clean water and air and advocates for clean energy.

