

Village of Tinley Park

News Release



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Initial independent review of water meter program shows no systemic overbilling; recommends policy and procedure reforms to improve customer responsiveness

Data analysis shows digital display meters improved overall accuracy but need to better handle complaints of mechanical problems

Concerns raised about the operation and accuracy of its “smart meter” program prompted the Village of Tinley Park to engage West Monroe Partners, a technical consulting firm, to conduct an initial examination of the program, systemic water billing trends, and individual customer cases of “smart meter” malfunctions.

The results of this initial report, which is titled “Water Meter Assessment Project Results and Recommendations” and is available on the Village website at www.tinleypark.org/DocumentCenter/View/2913, show that while overall system accuracy has improved, residents have experienced increasing water costs due primarily to higher wholesale costs as opposed to malfunctioning water meters. The portion of the water bill charged by the City of Chicago has increased by 187% over the last seven years.

In summary, the initial findings by West Monroe Partners show:

- There has been no systemic meter overbilling for water use.
- The increase in water bills over the past decade is due primarily to a higher wholesale price charged by the City of Chicago water supplier.
- The analysis indicates digital display meters helped reduce overall variation in water bills.
- The term “meter spinning” was inconsistently and inaccurately applied to describe different mechanical problems with a small number of smart meters.

(more)

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- Water meter mechanical breakdowns have occurred and resulted primarily in no water flow being measured and estimated bills being used.
- Department procedures did not provide for a uniform assessment of water meter complaints or establish a consistent process to resolve complaints, and improvements are needed.

These findings, which are described in extensive detail in the West Monroe Partners report, show that the use of digital display meters has improved the overall accuracy of the Village's water meter system but that there remains a clear need to develop more thorough policies to proactively examine usage anomalies and to effectively address customer complaints.

The Village remains committed to determining the facts, both system-wide and also with respect to specific meters. The Village will be looking at the replacement schedule for the old meters, reviewing how detection of the high readings can be improved and analyzing how resident appeals are handled. Through this examination of the water meter system elected officials and Village staff will be able to develop policies and procedures that will enhance billing accuracy and customer service and ultimately restore the confidence of residents in their water system.

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