



MEMORANDUM

Date: June 26, 2014

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Sewer Fees Billing Alternatives**

I have asked our Regional Wastewater Reclamation Director and others to examine sewer fee billing alternatives. The current method is using water utilities to send bills and collect the County's sewer user fees. Potential alternatives may result in a simplified monthly sewer user bill for residential properties and other classes of sewer users.

The County currently spends nearly \$4 million annually to reimburse various water utilities for this service. At the same time, we have our own collections and billing staff. A simplified version of a sewer user bill, attached to the property tax bill for example, could reduce these costs by orders of magnitude, resulting in a savings to the user.

We are exploring a number of alternatives. One simple alternative has been developed by another agency in California, which transitioned their bimonthly billings to an annual bill included in the property tax bill, which eases notification and collection. Questions and answers regarding this change to sewer billing methodology in California are shown on the attached sheet.

CHH/anc

Attachment

c: John Bernal, Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Jackson Jenkins, Director, Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department

**LA MESA SEWER BILLING
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Q. Why is La Mesa changing their sewer billing system?

A. We currently utilize Helix Water District's billing system to bill our sewer customers. The system is outdated and difficult to support. Helix is in the process of updating their billing system and the new system will not be able to support La Mesa's billing function.

Q. Why did we choose to put it on the property tax bill?

A. Billing with the property taxes is much more efficient and less expensive to manage. By putting it on the property tax bill we are able to keep billing costs to a minimum and implement "green" business practices.

Q. Who else bills their sewer customers on the property tax bill?

A. Half of the agencies in San Diego County already bill for sewer on the property tax bill. They are: Coronado, Encinitas, Imperial Beach, Lemon Grove, National City, San Marcos, Solana Beach, Vista, all unincorporated County areas, and Chula Vista (the southern portion).

Q. When will the City discontinue bi-monthly billing and begin billing on the property taxes?

A. The City plans to stop mailing out bi-monthly sewer bills on July 1, 2012. Sewer charges for fiscal year 2012/2013 will be collected with your property taxes which are mailed out by the County Assessor-Tax Collector's office in October and are due in November and February.

Q. How will I know how much my sewer charges are going to be?

A. The City will mail a letter to every property owner each year in June which will show their annual sewer charges and how they were calculated. The property owner can use this information for budgeting purposes, to adjust their impound account, or to estimate rental charges if necessary.

Q. What if my property taxes are paid by my escrow company through an impound account?

A. Customers that pay property taxes through an impound account may need to adjust their monthly impound payment to cover the sewer service charges. Call your escrow company and inform them about the additional charges. The City will mail a letter to every property owner each year in June which will indicate the annual sewer charge amount. These charges are not tax-deductible on your income tax return and therefore should not be used to reduce your tax burden.

Q. What if there's a mistake on the bill?

A. The City will mail a letter to every property owner each year in June which will show their annual sewer charges and how they were calculated. If there's a mistake you will have time to contact the City to make the correction before it shows up on your property tax bill.

Q. How is the City planning to inform it's customers about the change?

A. The City is planning to conduct an extensive outreach campaign to provide information about the change to its sewer customers. Outreach activities will include direct mailers to all property owners, billing inserts and messages in the sewer bills, specific outreach to apartment owners, press releases to the local newspapers and articles in the Focus newsletter and a designated web page on the City of La Mesa website. The City is also required to hold a public hearing before the change can go into effect.

Q. What if I have additional questions?

A. If you have additional questions or would like more information, please visit our website at www.cityoflamesa.com/Sewer or call 619.961.2848.