
Town of Wilbraham

Water Meter Replacement and Radio Reader Installation Program

OVERVIEW OF THE WATER METER AND READING SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

The Wilbraham Water Department is currently conducting a meter replacement program utilizing a new wireless meter technology that will improve customer service by capturing water meter readings in a more efficient manner. The new water meter and reading system improvement program will install new, more accurate meters that can be read via radio frequencies that send usage data directly to the Water Dept. truck. The new meter technology will increase accuracy, eliminate estimates, and lower operational costs.

ABOUT THE WATER METER READING SYSTEM

How does it work?

- Using wireless radio transmitters, customer meters are read remotely. This data is then transferred into the billing system.
- This system will drastically reduce the need for Meter Readers to manually gather water meter readings.

Why is the Town installing these meters?

- The meter installation is an upgrade to newer technology that will improve our service to you. Some existing meters in Wilbraham have reached their end of service life and under/over register water usage. The new meters will provide a more accurate recording of consumption and a more cost-effective way of transferring that data to the Water Department. In addition, this program will improve the Town's infrastructure and increase our ability to respond to customer inquiries. Meter Readers will no longer need to visit each meter to get consumption data and billing will become more accurate.

What powers the radio transmitter?

- The transmitter is a battery-powered device. The expected life of the battery is 20 years, which coincides with the expected life of a residential water meter.

Has this new equipment been tested for accuracy and reliability?

- Yes, this equipment has gone through numerous tests for billing accuracy and system reliability.

Do I need to maintain the meter?

- No. The Town will handle all ongoing maintenance of the equipment. Do not tamper with the devices. Do not bang on them or attempt to adjust them. Teach children never to touch or play with utility equipment including the meters and transmitters. If you think something is wrong with the equipment, *please call the Department of Public Works at 413-596-2800 x208.*

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- ✓ You will not have to be home to get an accurate meter reading.
- ✓ Reduces estimated readings.
- ✓ Provides accurate water usages for all customers.
- ✓ Lowers operational costs to read meters.
- ✓ Usage information data will be electronically transmitted to the Water Department.

HOW WILL SERVICES BE IMPROVED?

- *Improved* meter reading accuracy
- *Minimize* need to access your property to read your meter
- *Efficient and greener* service by reducing the number of personnel and trucks in the field

SAFETY & SECURITY

What information will be transmitted?

- The module transmits meter readings and the meter identification number.

Is my account information secure?

- Yes, only meter readings and meter numbers are transmitted.
- Personal customer information will not be transmitted.

Will the radio transmitter interfere with my television, cordless phone, garage doors or pacemaker?

- No, the radio transmissions occur on a frequency different from those used by television signals, cordless phones, garage doors, and pacemakers.

Are there any potential health concerns with the radio signals?

- Studies made on low-power RF transmissions have revealed no negative health impacts. The meter transmits for less than a minute. The transmissions from the device are comparatively of much lower power, lesser duration, and of farther proximity to customers than typical household devices such as cellular or cordless phones, and televisions. Other common household devices that also use low-power radio signals include wireless internet systems, laptop computers, video game consoles, and baby monitors.

Is there anything hazardous inside the equipment?

- No, only ordinary electronics and batteries are inside the equipment.

Is this radio device a listening device used to listen to conversations in my basement or utility room?

- No. This device only transmits encoded water meter register readings.

METER REPLACEMENT & INSTALLATION

When will the installations begin taking place?

- Installation of meters began in 2020 and are continuing.

Can you explain the installation process?

- a. Installation of the new meter takes approximately 30-60 minutes in most cases, with your water service being unavailable for up to 30 minutes that time.
- b. To ensure that the installation is complete, workers will briefly test the new meter.
- c. The installer will clean up the work area to restore the area to its original condition.
- d. Installers will take a before and after photo of the installation.
- e. Before temporarily interrupting individual water services, crews will make every effort to ensure that doing so will not impose an undue hardship on the customer.
- f. Additionally, the installers have been trained to identify lead services. If a lead service is identified during the meter installation process, the Town will alert the homeowners to the hazards of lead service piping. The Town understands the potential risks with lead service lines and is providing this value-added service as it strives to continue to provide safe, clean water to the Town of Wilbraham residents.

Do I need to make an appointment to have my meter installed?

- No. The Water Dept. will contact you for an appointment.
- The entire meter replacement process takes approximately 30-60 minutes to complete with a water service interruption of up to 30 minutes. Please be advised some installations may take longer due to piping issues, location of meter, etc.

How long will it take for my meter to be installed?

- Once inside your home, each water meter installation will take approximately 30-60 minutes. In some cases, it might be determined by the Town that the structural integrity of the pipe at your foundation wall will prohibit the installation of the new water meter. Should this be the case you will be contacted by Town of Wilbraham Water Department on what measures will need to be taken in order to install the new water meter.
- Additionally, there may be some trapped air or slight discoloration in the water line that results from the change out. This will clear up after running your water for a few moments. You may hear some noise as the air exits spigots and fixtures. This is normal.

Will workers need to enter my home to install the new meter?

- Yes, two persons from the Town of Wilbraham Water Department will need to enter your home. Both workers will have proper identification and will arrive in marked vehicles.

Do I need to do anything to my home or business before you install the new water meter?

- Yes. You need to remove anything within a three (3) foot radius of your water meter and reading device. Your water meter is most likely located in your basement or crawl space, usually along the front wall of your house, where your water service enters from the street. Someone over the age of 18 must be home, and remain home, to allow the installers access to the existing meter.
- To help keep everyone safe, dogs and any other domestic pets will need to be secured during installation.

Do I need to be home for the water meter appointment?

- Yes, or someone 18 or over needs to be home and remain home during the installation process. We cannot enter anyone's home without someone being home.

When are appointments normally scheduled?

- Appointments are usually scheduled during the hours of 7:30 AM and 2:30 PM Monday through Friday for water meter replacements.

How long will it take to complete the project?

- The project is scheduled to be completed over 7 to 10 years.

How do I know that the people who come to my house are representing the Town as part of this project?

- All Town personnel assigned to the project will have a conspicuously displayed picture identification badge.
- All vehicles used by these individuals will also be marked Town vehicles.
- If you ever have any question about the identity of someone who claims to be working on behalf of the Town of Wilbraham, please call the Water Department at 413-596-2800 x208.

Will my water service be interrupted?

- Yes, service interruptions will generally last less than a half hour.

OTHER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Why is the Town installing new water meters?

- Many of the Town's existing water meters have been in service past their useful life. Failed meters result in estimated water usage or under-reported water usage. The older meters are not compatible with current meter reading systems. The new meters will transmit the water meter reading to the DPW and accurately report your consumption.

Is this new system really needed?

- Yes. We strive to provide the best possible customer service, high reliability and billing accuracy. The new technology will help us achieve these goals. As water meters get older they become less accurate and need to be replaced.

Does this mean my bill will be increasing?

- Not necessarily. In some cases, your bill may increase, but only if your current meter is underreporting usage. Presently residents with newer meters are paying for the water they are actually using, while a few residents with older meters are only paying for a fraction of the water. This condition is not fair to all residents. The new system will ensure fairness and equality for all the residents and businesses from this point forward.

Will I be charged for the new meter?

- No. The meter and installation are provided to the property owner at no charge. If existing plumbing is in disrepair, the owner may incur a cost associated with fixing the plumbing prior to installation.

Will I see a change in my service after the meters are installed?

- The only significant change to your utility service will be that once the system is operating, Meter Readers will not need to visit your property to collect the meter readings. Service

personnel may visit the meter periodically to confirm proper operation or perform routine maintenance.

Does the upgrade work require a licensed plumber?

- In some rare instances, where modifications to the existing plumbing are needed to change out the water meter, a licensed plumber will be required.

Isn't my water meter on the outside of the home?

- No, water meters are located within the home to prevent freezing in the winter months. Installers will be replacing the water meter inside your home and installing a new transmitter.

Is this something I have to do?

- Yes, this is a mandatory meter replacement/upgrade. The Town requires that all water customers receive new meters. Refusal to allow the Town to replace your meter will result in a water shut off.

How do you know that my reading is accurate?

- This “state-of-the-art” meter reading technology uses electronic registers to collect the meter readings and a radio to transmit the data. This system has proven to be more accurate than visually reading the meter by removing the possibility for human errors. Also, each transmitter has a unique identification number that is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique identification number is compared electronically to your account record to ensure that the meter reading received matches the meter assigned to your account.

After installation of the new read meter, will a Meter Reader still need access to the property to read my meter?

- No. The new water meter reading system is automatic and can be read without residents having to report their usage.

Will the meter interfere with my other household appliances such as computer routers, television signal, cordless phones, etc.?

- The meter and transmitter will not adversely affect the stability or performance of home wireless networks.

What if I have more questions about the meter replacement program implementation?

- You can contact the Town of Wilbraham Water Department at 413-596-2800 x208 Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. You can also email dpw@wilbraham-ma.gov for more information.