

Understanding and Improving Water Usage in Strata

It is likely your unit or townhouse does not have an individual water meter as most apartment buildings in NSW have only one main meter. This is due to it not being a requirement for new developments until 2014.

For those buildings with only one master water meter, costs are incurred as follows:

- Each owner receives a quarterly bill from Sydney Water which is a fixed charge for provision of services e.g. stormwater and sewerage. This bill does not include any water consumption.
- The Owners Corporation receive a quarterly bill for all water consumed at the complex. This includes all common area taps and toilets but also water usage for all apartments including their taps, toilets, washing machines etc.
So water usage is paid by the Strata and each owner contributes to this via the levies.

Below are examples of the different bills for your reference:

Example water bill paid by an individual owner:

Last bill	Payments	Balance	This bill	Total amount due
\$145.20	\$145.20	\$0.00	\$145.15	\$145.15

Please pay by 28/10/10

Your name & address

Account number

Account for strata unit		Property Address
Fixed charges - GST free	1 Oct 10 - 31 Dec 10	\$
Water service		3.97
Wastewater (sewerage) service		129.29
Stormwater drainage area		11.92
Other charges and credits		-0.03
Credit		-0.03
Total amount due		\$145.15

Example water bill paid by an Owners Corporation:

Last bill	Payments	Balance	This bill	Total amount due
\$10438.55	\$10438.55	\$0.00	\$10466.35	\$10466.35

Please pay by See below

Account number

THE OWNERS - STRATA PLAN XXXXX

Account for master strata		Property Address	
Usage charge - GST free	17 Jul 09 - 19 Oct 09	\$	
Water	17/07 - 19/10	5597 kLs at \$1.8700 per kL. See over for details	10466.39
Other charges and credits		-0.04	
Credit		-0.04	
Total amount due		\$10466.35	

Can we retrofit meters so each owner pays for their own usage?

Retrofitting individual meters for existing buildings is often not feasible due to the location of the plumbing services and even where possible, it can be an extremely expensive exercise.

If you would like to explore possible options for your building, we can arrange for a plumber to attend and investigate. We have had some success with single level buildings and commercial premises for example.

There is technology driven options on the market that the Owner's Corporation can consider (e.g. independent smart metering) however they are still very expensive and significant risks involve legal, billing, debt collection and liability. So whilst the concept is impressive, the payback just doesn't add up.

Sudden increase in water consumption – what are the possible causes?

Burst pipes

A burst pipe that is hidden in either a wall or under the ground can waste kilolitres of water and cost owners corporations thousands of dollars. Sometimes the location is evident by dampness in the ground or even the sound of water running. However sometimes it is not as easily detected and only suspected when the next invoice shows a significant increase in water usage and costs. Strata Life reviews the water usage on all bills to detect significant increases in usage.

If a burst pipe is suspected, a plumber will be required to locate and repair the leakage. Once resolved the Owner's Corporation can lodge a claim for a rebate on excess usage via Sydney Water

Note – Only one claim is accepted every 5 years.

Leaking taps and toilets

Leaking taps and toilets add significant usage to an Owner's Corporation consumption and is especially noticeable with smaller schemes.

As the repairs are the responsibility of individual owners, we usually suggest that a letter is issued to all residents with a copy to the Property Manager and the Owner requesting that they report any leakages and arrange repairs. Another option is for the Owner's Corporation to instruct a plumber undertake an inspection of all units and provide a report on any leaks found.

The Owners of those units can then be advised and requested to provide evidence that the repair has been undertaken. This approach is at additional cost to the Owner's Corporation for the plumbers time, however ensures each unit is checked.

General increased usage

In smaller complexes simply having a couple of families move into a unit which was formally occupied by a single person or couple can add to the usage and unfortunately there is little that can be done in this situation other than request residents are mindful on usage as per the tips listed below.

Ways to determine cause:

If the cause is a burst pipe or a leaking toilet there will be continuous usage and the main water meter will be ticking over even when no taps or appliances are in use. To confirm, the best approach is for a resident to check the meter at a time of day when you would expect no one to be using any taps or appliances that use water. This may be in the middle of the day when occupants are at work, or early morning/ late at night.

What can we do to reduce water usage at the property?

Tips for residents to help reduce water usage:

- Fix leaking taps and constantly running toilets. One leaking tap can waste up to 2,000 litres a month. Arrange a plumber to replace washers as soon as the tap begin to leak.
- Buy water-efficient washing machines and dishwashers
- Install water-efficient showerheads to reduce hot & cold water usage – *Over 50% of usage if from showers.*
- Wait until you have a full load in your washing machine and dishwashers and use the economy mode. This saves water and energy.
- Wash fruit and vegies in a half-filled sink instead of running water
- Use a plug in the sink rather than letting the tap run continuously
- Take shorter showers, ideally 4 minutes or less. Use a shower timer as a reminder
- Turn the tap off while you brush your teeth
- Use the half flush when flushing your toilet
- Collect the water wasted while your shower water warms up and use it to water your plants



Look out for the water rating symbol on all electronic devices and tapware that you buy.

Can we install a water tank at our Strata?

With water restrictions and increasing cost of water it is recommended that any strata or individual owners who live in strata, and have the available space, consider the installation of a water tank.

Rainwater stored in a tank can be collected from all roof areas and used for outdoor uses such as garden watering and irrigation systems and car washing. There are a number of considerations for installing and using a rainwater tank and the Australian Government has some helpful information [HERE](#) as a starting point and this includes information on possible rebates.

There are often requirements for approval from the Owners Corporation or Committee for the installation of rain water tanks on common property or even inside individual garden spaces. Approval is dependant of your individual scheme so best to contact our office as a first step to discuss the process and assist where possible.