



Water Usage, Meters and Fines Frequently Asked Questions

City Hall – (559) 897-5821

As California continues to battle a historic [four year drought](#), the State has mandated cuts for all municipal water providers. As such, the City has implemented several restrictions to help curb usage. Below are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions. If you are still unable to find the answer you're looking for, please call City Hall at 897-5821 or email us at ahenderson@cityofkingsburg-ca.gov. We appreciate the complex nature of the issue, and want to do what we can to make sure you're satisfied with the service you receive. We also encourage you to sign up for our weekly e-newsletter, the [Kingsburg Carrier](#), which contains current, relevant information to keep you informed.

Q. Why are we required to cut usage?

- A. On April 1, 2015, Governor Brown issued an Executive Order B-29-15 (EO) requiring mandatory cutbacks. As part of the EO, the [State Water Resources Control Board](#) has developed baseline data to help identify the heaviest users.

Unfortunately, Kingsburg is one of the largest consumers of water per capita in the entire State. Data from September 2013 shows that Kingsburg residents used 308 gallons of water, per person, per day. National averages indicate usage between 80-100 gallons per person, per day. Because of this, we're required to cut usage by 36% (as compared to 2013 usage).

Q. What if we don't meet our cutback requirements?

- A. The State has indicated that they have the ability to fine non-complying agencies up to \$10,000 per day. For the first three months (June, July, August), the City has met or exceeded our cutback mandate.

Q. When are the meters read and bills distributed?

- A. You will receive your bill one month after it is read. Remember, your meter is read after you've used the water, and you're billed in arrears (after it has been used and read).

An example:

You use water at your home in the month of July. The City then reads your meter in the first part of August. We then download the information, check it for any errors,

and then submit the bills for printing and mailing. Residents receive the bill the first week in September – due on the 19th. This process continues.

We operate differently than a for-profit company such as PG&E. While they have larger departments, our staff handles a number of different duties at City Hall. Much of this is done to maintain current water rates, which are some of the lowest in the Valley.

Q. I've heard about a \$45 fine for using water over a certain amount. What is this for?

- A. The City Council enacted a number of [new provisions](#) to help meet the 36% mandated cut. One provision includes a maximum water usage allotment per residence. These limits are set monthly, and if exceeded, come with a \$45 overuse penalty that is added to your utility bill.

For example, in the month of June, residences were allowed to use up to 27,000 without incurring a fine. If a home used over 27,000, a fine for \$45 was added to their bill.

Q. I've cut down on my usage but still received a \$45 fine, how?

- A. This could be from a number of factors. First, it may be the difference in when you enacted the changes and the bill for which you received the fine. This is because you water usage is read in arrears (after it has been used).

An example:

You use water at your home in the month of July. The City then reads your meter in the first part of August. We then take the information, check it for any errors, and then submit the bills for printing and mailing. Residents receive the bill the first week in September – due on the 19th. This process continues. So while you may have made changes to your watering habits in August, the bill you receive in September is for July. Your conservation adjustments will be reflected in your next bill.

If that's not the case, it's from overall water consumption. The major contributors to this are:

- Outdoor irrigation. Outdoor watering should be limited to 5-7 minutes per station, a few times on allowed watering days. Watering for 20-25 minutes is excessive. Studies have shown that up to 50% of water use outdoors is [wasted](#).
- Potential leaks. You can check for leaks by shutting off all the water in your home and then examining your water meter. If the numbers are still turning, you have a leak.
- Self-filling pools. Your pool refilling could be a major consumer of water.
- Running toilet. A running toilet can use up to 2 gallons per minute! That's nearly 3,000 gallons per day!

Q. How could I possibly have used that much water?

A. While leaks and other factors can affect your overall water usage, the biggest single contributor is outdoor use. Watering your lawn has the ability to add up very quickly.

An example:

While all sprinkler systems may differ, here is an example of a typical sprinkler system:

- Each sprinkler head uses approximately 5 gallons per minute. So, if you water for 20 minutes, one head will use 100 gallons.
- If you have 5 sprinkler heads per zone, that's 500 gallons per zone.
- If you have 5 zones, that's 2,500 gallons for one watering cycle.
- If you water twice per week, that's 5,000 gallons per week.
- That is 20,000 gallons for four weeks of outdoor watering.

Again, while your individual results may vary, and times may differ, this is an example of the water consumed solely for outdoor irrigation. This doesn't take into account your indoor use.

We recommend watering each station for 5-7 minutes, twice a day (on allotted days and allowable times). This keeps your lawn fed, and reduces the likelihood of overwatering.

Q. We've cut down on showers and laundry, my lawn is dead, and I've still received a fine. How can this be?

Again, examine your outdoor usage. In almost all instances, indoor use will not be the cause of you going over your monthly allotment.

An example:

The [US EPA](#) has indicated that the average family uses 400 gallons of water per day, with 70% coming from indoor use (280 gallons). Indoor use is water you use from your tap, toilet, dishwasher, etc. Using 280 gallons per home, per day, over a 30 day period would equate to 8,400 gallons per month for the average family.

To break it down further, [other studies](#) have indicated that the average household uses about 60 gallons per person, per day for indoor water use. Using a 30 day usage period, that equates to the following:

- 2 people; 3,600 gallons
- 3 people; 5,400 gallons
- 4 people; 7,200 gallons
- 5 people; 9,000 gallons
- 6 people; 10,800 gallons

Again, while indoor conservation is very important, you can see that the biggest contributor to water use is for outdoor irrigation. Strategically watering for shorter periods of time will allow you to reduce your use and will benefit the health of your lawn, and your utility bill.

Q. I didn't know anything about the penalty and now I've gotten a \$45 dollar fine, can I appeal?

A. The City will consider waiving the penalty on a case by case basis, but "not knowing" is not a suitable reason. The City Council discussed the item six times during public meetings from April to June. The City has included an insert in each properties water bill, and have also provided information on a consistent basis through the use of our website and social media. We've also worked closely with the Kingsburg Recorder to include articles about the restrictions and provisions that residents must follow.

Q. What is the City doing with the \$45 fines that are collected?

A. All penalty funds are kept in a separate revenue account and used for water conservation efforts. For example, the City has retrofitted all existing landscape medians, converting them all to drip. In addition, the City purchased 200 water timers to be used by residents free of charge. This purchase was nearly \$10,000.

The City Council continues to discuss options for potential incentives or ways to reinvest the funds into conservation related efforts.

Q. I've read that Proposition 218 doesn't allow tiered rates or penalties?

A. Proposition 218 is a law that requires voters consent for rate increases. Recently, a [lawsuit in Southern California](#) challenged the legality of a tiered rate water structure that penalized higher users. Ultimately, the Court determined that a water agency may set rates that go up progressively in relation to usage in compliance with Proposition 218 if the tiers correspond to the actual cost of providing the service at each given level of usage.

Q. How do I read my meter?

A. 99% of Kingsburg homes are now equipped with a water meter. You can [read your meter](#) by lifting the lid on your meter box. A good rule of thumb is to read your meter one day per week, then recheck it at the same day/time the next week. This will give you a rough estimate for one full week's usage (outdoor watering, laundry, etc.). You can then multiply this by four to give you an estimate of how much water you use in a month's period.

Q. Can I view historical usage data?

A. Yes. You can view [data online](#), or you can contact City Hall for information about previous usage (those homes with recently installed water meters will have minimal historical data).

Q. I have several people living in my household. Do I get a higher allotment?

A. Not at this time. Part of the reason for this is the ability to document and administer up to 3,400 separate billing requirements. Existing software has limitations as well. Staff and Council continue to discuss options for those who practice conservation, but are limited by household size.

Q. There must be something wrong with my meter – will you check it?

- A. Yes. The City will provide this service for a \$50 fee. If it's proven that there has been an error with the meter, your \$50 fee will be refunded along with any penalties incurred (if applicable). The purpose of the \$50 fee is to cover the employee's time.

The City will still provide services free of charge to homes if there are issues with water pressure, etc. The fee itself is only for those wishing to complete a consultation and re-check of their usage amounts.

Q. What will the employee do if I pay the \$50 for a visit?

- A. An employee from our water department will run a 90 day report that shows your overall usage. This report breaks down your usage by day and time – and has the ability to show leaks, heavy usage, etc. The employee will also give you a consultation on how to reduce usage.

Q. I've heard my meter could be calibrated incorrectly and should have it checked?

- A. It's true that a water meter can malfunction (almost always because of wear). When this occurs, the meter will fail to read, causing it to register less water used, not more. Again, if you feel there is an issue with the meter, you can pay the fee to have it checked. If it turns out there is a mechanical issues with the meter, or the City has erred, your fee will be refunded.

Q. I've heard about fines of up to \$500, is this from overuse?

- A. The \$45 monthly overuse fee is totally separate from a citation for illegal watering practices. There are separate fines for illegal watering practices, including:

- Watering on the wrong day
- Watering at the wrong time
- Excessive watering

These fines are incremental, and start at \$25 for the first offense. They continue at \$50 for a second offense, \$100 for a third and \$500 for subsequent fines. To date, the City has issued one \$500 fine to a commercial apartment complex.

Q. Is Kingsburg running out of water?

- A. No. The City is fortunate to be located in place with a healthy aquifer. However, this doesn't mean we don't need to do our part to conserve. The City operates seven wells, with an average depth of nearly 800 feet. Our water table averages about 75 feet deep, but has dropped over the past two years. We all need to do our part now to make sure we can continue to be sustainable should the drought continue.

Q. I've seen the City facilities operating at the wrong day and/or time – why is this allowed?

- A. It isn't allowed. All of our facilities have been modified to meet the same watering requirements that residents must follow. With over 90 locations that are

maintained there are a number of issues that we encounter. We appreciate the notification of the problem and your understanding while we get it fixed.

We offer our residents the same leniency if there is a legitimate reason for the violation. Thus far, we've issued 46 citations, and almost all of them have been for overwatering (water running past the property line). We will take into consideration extenuating circumstances (power loss, etc.).

Q. Has the City offered any incentives to promote conservation?

A. Yes. Residents can pick up a free water timer located at City Hall. The timer fits on a hose bib and allows you to set timers for sprinklers or drip systems.

In addition, the State of California is [offering incentives](#) for conservation.

Q. I have friends and family that live in other Valley cities that don't have the same fines. Why are we different?

A. Each community has different variables to contend with. Some Cities may have to cut less than 36%, while others have different infrastructure (not all Cities are fully metered at this point). In any case, it's very difficult to provide an apples to apples comparison.

While this list is intended to provide answers to many of the questions we've received, please contact City Hall at 897-5821 if you have additional questions or concerns. You can also email City Clerk Sue Bauch at sbauch@cityofkingsburg-ca.gov or City Manager Alex Henderson at ahenderson@cityofkingsburg-ca.gov. Don't forget to sign up for the [Kingsburg Carrier](#).