

How Much Does Your Water Cost?

Each gallon of City of Ann Arbor water costs about half a penny for both the water and sewer charges. The average Ann Arbor household has three people and uses about 250 gallons of water per day. Water utility bills are based on "water units." One water unit (100 cubic feet) is equivalent to 748 gallons of water. Water bills are calculated and mailed every three months to most users, although some users are billed monthly. The average bill is for 25-30 units of water, or \$134-\$162 per quarter (or \$154-\$180 without the 10% on-time payment discount). How do water costs leap from the pennies per use to \$100+ on quarterly bills? Each water activity adds up: Toilets generally account for about 25% of the daily household water usage, and frequent lawn watering can double water use in the summer. Since 2004, the city's water utility has used a tiered approach to water prices. The lowest water rate is calculated for the first seven water units, with an increased charge for the next 8-28 units, a higher rate for 29-45 units, and the highest rate for over 46 units.

Here are three major ways to reduce expenses and conserve water:

- **Fix leaks.** A running toilet can cost \$400 or more in three months! Add vegetable dye to the toilet tank reservoir and check back in 15 minutes. If the color has migrated into the bowl, you have a leak, even if you can't hear it. A faucet leak of just one drop per second wastes 2,400 gallons/year. Also periodically check for leaks from humidifiers, hot water heaters, refrigerators, and outside faucets or sprinklers.
- **Make water conservation a habit.** Don't leave the tap running while brushing teeth or shaving. Be aware of shower time durations. Purchase low-flow toilets (1.6 gallon per flush vs. 8 gallons/flush). Install aerators on faucets and showers to provide the 'feel' of a full blast of water at a fraction of the flow per minute.
- **Be aware of seasonal water use.** Compare your water bills through the seasons to discover ways to conserve water. Filling pools, watering landscapes, washing cars, and operating water-cooled air conditioners or humidifiers are activities that potentially consume large amounts of water. Outdoors, you may choose to reduce lawn areas, plant native species, apply mulch around plantings, and water only as needed (1 inch of rain or sprinkler water every 10 days).

For more information on water usage and conservation actions, consult the Huron River Watershed Council, www.hrwc.org, 734.769.5123 and the California Urban Water Conservation Council www.H2Ouse.org.

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January 2007 Phosphorus Fertilizer Lawn Ordinance Begins

To comply with a federal mandate to reduce phosphorus levels by 50 percent in the Huron River, a ban on the application of phosphorus lawn fertilizers will go into effect on January 1, 2007. Since phosphorus is naturally abundant in southeast Michigan soils, surplus applications of this nutrient simply wash out of the soil and into the Huron River via storm drains and retention ponds. The extra boost of phosphorus in the river then increases the growth of algae, which degrades the quality of water for plants, fish, wildlife, recreation, and drinking water processing. Too much phosphorus is an easily preventable problem!

Here's how to comply with Ann Arbor's phosphorus ordinance :

- Do not apply any lawn fertilizer between November 15 and April 1 to prevent fertilizer runoff from frozen ground.
- Do not use lawn fertilizer with phosphorus in Ann Arbor, unless a recent soil test within the last three years indicates that phosphorus is low or when starting new grass. Phosphorus is permitted in garden and tree fertilizers.

Q: Where do I find phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer?

A: Area gardening stores have been notified of this ordinance and will be stocking non-phosphorus lawn fertilizer products in Ann Arbor. If you choose to use lawn fertilizers, look for phosphorus-free products at area garden centers.

Q: How can I tell if there is phosphorus in a lawn fertilizer?

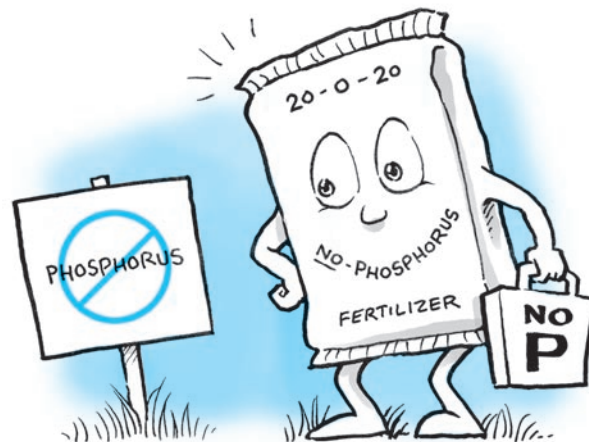
A: Fertilizer packages generally display three prominent numbers for "Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potash." The middle number should be a zero for phosphorus.

Q: What do I need to tell my lawn care company about this ordinance?

A: Commercial applicators have been notified by the city and know that they are required to report annually on their phosphorus lawn applications within Ann Arbor. Most already have dropped the nutrient from their applications because their soil tests do not support the extra expense of adding phosphorus to lawn treatments.

Q: How do I dispose of leftover lawn fertilizer with phosphorus?

A: Leftover bags of phosphorus fertilizer may be taken to the Washtenaw County Home Toxics Reduction and Collection Center, open Saturday mornings, April through the first Saturday in December (excluding holiday weekends), from 9 a.m. to noon, 705 N. Zeeb Road, <http://recycle.eWashtenaw.org>, or by scheduling an appointment (734) 222-3950.



Good to Know...

• **Save time by setting up an automatic water bill payment option from your checking account.** To initiate an Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) account service, simply find a recent water bill and a blank check, then phone the Customer Service Center at (732) 994-2666 during weekday business hours. Once your EFT is initiated, you will still be mailed a detailed water bill receipt marked "Thank you for your EFT payment" and will always receive the "on time" payment discount.

• **Use your garbage disposal and protect our local water quality.** Ann Arbor's Wastewater Treatment Plant uses beneficial microorganisms to remove dissolved solids and phosphorus from wastewater. This biological process reduces the need to use chemicals for phosphorus removal. Some ground-up food mixed in with sewage helps to provide the microorganisms with a well-balanced diet. Your donation of properly ground food leftovers is an acceptable addition! However, please remember that fats, oils, or grease should never be poured down the drain, as these materials are harmful to your plumbing and the wastewater treatment system.



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