Billing and Bill Collection

Billing and bill collection revolve around data base management – management of meter readings, customer account information and billing records. In that billing is most effective for both the utility and the customer if it occurs on a regular, predictable basis (e.g., the first of every month), billing practices must revolve around those policies and procedures that a utility conducts on a regular interval (monthly, bi-monthly, etc.) to collect and archive customer meter reading information, and generate and mail bills to each of its customers.

Even though billings can be a very personalized process, performed differently by each water utility, the business of billing is very much the same everywhere. For this reason, computer-based tools have been developed to assist water utilities with the common data base management tasks that are a component of all utility billing efforts. In that maintaining consistent electronic files help a water utility with record-keeping, auditing, and reporting, and can reduce systematic data handling errors, best management practices for all utilities should consider the use of computer based programs that support all aspects of billing data archiving, bill production, and bill collection.

In addition, some utilities may wish to forgo or at least reduce the number of bills mailed to customers to reduce operating expenses.   In addition, some customers find online bill paying easier and more convenient. In response to these growing interests, online billing programs have been gaining popularity. Therefore, online billing programs may increasingly be worth consideration for most water utilities, as web based commerce grows in popularity and reliability.

The best management practices for billing and bill collection involve the following:

- Utilize **Monthly meter reading and billing,** whenever possible
- Engage in electronic data management of meter and billing records, preferably using a customized billing **software** package. (Note that there are many for profit organizations that provide electronic utility billing support that are available to water utilities. A few links have been provided below to indicate some of the types of available vendors; however, these links are in no way a endorsement of these vendors, and any utility that is looking to engage an electronic data management software and/or service provider will need to conduct its own evaluation of vendors based on the specific needs of the organization.)

    Example Utility Billing Software Providers (Some include meter reading applications and support)

    Donald R. Frey & Company

    MuniBilling

    CapTerra

    RVS Software

- Move toward **automated meter reading (AMR),** using drive by devices or telemetry to collect meter readings (even if snow cover is in place) and place into the billing data base (to minimize data handling errors).
- Maintain explicit **policies that track customer shut-offs and re-connects** (especially for commercial accounts)