

## **Possible Reasons for High Water Bills**

Receiving high water bills time and time again is a nightmare, especially when the bills list thousands of gallons of usage that cannot be explained. It is important to find the possible reasons for high utility bills as soon as possible in an effort to lower consumption. Sometimes it is as simple as reducing shower time, and in other cases finding a solution requires the assistance of a plumber. In any case, begin looking for possible reasons for high water bills, and begin lowering usage today with the following tips and advice. You will save money while conserving a valuable commodity that we cannot live without.

### **Toilet Leakage and High Utility Bills**

A toilet can leak countless gallons of H<sub>2</sub>O each month, and if you think your toilet is not leaking because you cannot see or hear evidence of a leakage, reconsider the possibility. It is possible for a toilet tank to slowly and silently leak into the bowl, and this easy fix could be one of the reasons behind the high bills.

Check the toilets for leakage by squeezing a dozen or more drops of food coloring into the tank. Do not flush the toilet for several hours. Come back and check the bowl, and if any amount of color is in the bowl, the tank is leaking and wasting more than you probably realize. Replacing the seal and/or the arm that holds the chain usually solves this problem. Fortunately, most toilet leaks are relatively easy to fix. In a properly functioning toilet, no water should move from the tank to the bowl, unless the toilet is being flushed. A leaking toilet loses water from the tank to the bowl without being flushed (#1 below). A toilet can also waste water due to an improperly adjusted or broken fill (ballcock) valve causing water to enter the tank and flow into the overflow tube (#2 below).

1. Most toilet leaks are caused by a faulty valve (also known as “flush valve ball” or “tank stopper”). A flapper valve should be replaced every 3 to 5 years. This may also include the chain that attaches to the flapper, at times the chain can snag not allowing the flapper to close fully causing a continuous flushing of water. Most hardware, plumbing and home improvement stores supply flappers. How to check for a leaky toilet flush valve (flapper):
  - Carefully remove and set aside the tank lid. (Don't worry, this water is clean until it enters the bowl.)
  - Add some food coloring or a dye tablet to turn the water a different color.
  - Put the tank lid back on.
  - Wait a couple of hours and do not flush.
  - If dye appears in the toilet bowl, the flapper valve in your toilet is leaking and should be replaced.
2. The second most-common type of toilet leak is caused by an improperly adjusted or broken fill (ball cock) valve. If the float is set too high or if the shut-off valve fails to close completely, water will continue to enter the tank and flow into the overflow tube.

This type of leak can be seen simply by taking the tank top off and observing if water is flowing into the overflow tube once the tank is full.

## **Dripping Indoor and Outdoor Faucets Can Be One of the Reasons for High Bills**

Examine every faucet outside and well as inside the home. Chances are you would know if an interior faucet was leaking, but outdoor faucets are often ignored. If hoses are left in place over winter major leaks can occur. Newer outdoor faucets are designed to prevent pipes from freezing and breaking, but if freezing occurs the faucets will no longer work properly. Each time the faucet is turned on after freezing it will leak around the handle and waste valuable water. Also, a constant drip from an outdoor faucet is easy to overlook since the water often seeps into the ground, and a simple drip can be one of the reasons for high water bills. Inspect indoor and outdoor faucets for leaks, and replace or repair any faucets found to be leaking as soon as they are discovered. A leaking faucet is frequently the result of a bad rubber washer. The washer on a sink is typically located under the handle. A washer is relatively easy to replace with the right tools. It does require shutting off the water under the sink, and removing the handle. Check local home centers or the Internet (keywords "repairing leaky faucets") for help on how to repair faucet leaks.

## **Leaking Hidden Pipes and High Utility Bills**

Those with a basement are more likely to notice leaking pipes that could result in high water bills. The moisture will ultimately end up on the floor, even if the pipes are hidden behind walls or above ceiling panels. On the other hand, a home with a crawlspace can hide leaking pipes. People do not often go into the crawlspace, but when seeking possible reasons for high water bills it is necessary to examine the pipes beneath the home. Keep in mind it is easy to spot water on sand, dirt, or cement crawlspace floors, but crawlspace floors covered with rock will hide leaks. Go into the crawlspace with a flashlight, and follow the hot and cold water lines while looking for drips. If a leak is found, contact a licensed plumber to complete the repair. Hopefully this alone will end the nightmare of high water bills, and it will most definitely decrease the potential of harmful mold and mildew growth.

## **Partial Laundry Loads Can Be One of the Reasons for High Bills**

A washing machine can use dozens of gallons of water in a single load, depending on the age and the style of the unit. Everyone has to wash cloths and other fabrics, but washing partial loads can use a tremendous amount of water. Make it a rule that only full loads are washed and water usage will greatly decrease. Wash clothes wisely and high bills will decrease.

## **Long and Leisurely Showers and High Utility Bills**

Showers are convenient, and many people prefer showers over baths. Some people are under the impression that showers are the most economical way to get clean, and this might be true in some cases, but that depends on showering habits. How many times have you stayed in the shower until the warm water turned cold? If hot water was not being used anywhere else in the house, you just emptied the source of hot water, and this probably amounts to dozens of gallons. Consider the size of the water heater, and this is the least amount of water that was used for a single shower. The hot water was mixed with water from the cold tap, and that long leisurely shower could have drained away 40 or even 50 gallons of water! Do this each day and this is more than likely one of the reasons for high bills. Limit showers to five or ten minutes, and turn off the water while shaving. These steps alone will save gallons of water each day and help lower high bills.

## **Landscape Care Can Be One of the Reasons for High Bills**

Outdoor watering can use up hundreds of gallons each month, and if the landscape is watered even just once or twice a week, this can be one of the reasons for high bills. Consider how often outdoor plants are being watered. To help eliminate possible reasons for high bills, install a rain barrel to catch free water for outdoor use. Cut off a down spout at the proper height, and place a vinyl trash can beneath the spout. Attach the lid, and cut out an opening to accommodate the downspout. Keep the lid in place to prevent animals and small children from falling in, and to prevent mosquito larva and debris from entering. High bills can be drastically cut when natural sources are used for watering indoor as well as outdoor plants, and they will grow more profusely than ever. Please visit <http://www.villageoflombard.org/index.aspx?nid=272> for more information on the rain barrel grant program.

## **Vehicle Care and High Utility Bills**

When was the last time you washed a vehicle at home? Washing a vehicle of any size can amount to gallons of water and waste, and doing this just once a week can be one of the reasons for unusually high bills. Instead of washing the family car, truck or SUV at home, look for carwash bargains that come with gas or fuel purchases. Also, watch for carwash coupons, and stop wasting water at home. A few dollars to wash a vehicle at a carwash once or twice a month is a small price to pay to cut down on water usage and unusually high bills. Consider the labor involved as well as the cost of doing the job at home and it is well worth going to a fully automatic carwash facility. Additionally, carwashes are required to use recycled water to conserve water so it is better for the environment.

## **Flushing Toilets Can Be One of the Reasons for High Bills**

Chances are you are flushing the toilet many times per day. While not encouraging people to stop flushing the toilet after each use, we encourage the installation of water-saving products. A plastic 2 liter bottle filled with water and a few rocks placed in the tank reduces the amount of water per flush. Try different size bottles to see what works for your toilet. A water-saving toilet will save gallons of water with each flush, and if a flushing toilet is the source of high water bills, a new toilet will eventually pay for itself.

Do you have a cat? Some cats are fascinated by water, and cats are far smarter than many people realize. If you have a cat that is fascinated by the natural spring otherwise known as *the toilet*, you might discover a flushing cat as one of the reasons for unexplainable high water bills. Do not think that it cannot happen to you. Sometimes the reasons for high bills are reasons that we least expect!

## **Water Softeners Another Source of High Bills**

Water softeners are scheduled to regenerate from as little as every day to once a month. During and after regenerations, valves can get stuck open or partially open and possibly leak numerous gallons of water until the next regeneration cycle or even keep leaking indefinitely. If you have discontinued using your water softener, make sure the plumbing has been disconnected to prevent leaks through the system.

## How Much Water Do I Use Daily?

On average, a person uses about 40 to 80 gallons of water per day (gpd):

Use	Average / Person (gpd)
Bathing	15-25
Sink	3-5
Toilet	5-15
Washing Clothes	10-20
Washing Dishes	5-10
Cooking	1-2
Miscellaneous	1-3
<b>Total</b>	<b>40-80</b>

## How Much Water Is Lost?

Small household leaks left unrepaired can lead to big trouble over time.

Leak Source	Typical Leakage	Gallons/Day Used	Gallons/Month Used	Units/Month Used
Running toilet	1 gallon/minute	1,440	43,200	58
Leaking faucet	1 drip/second	9	259	.3
Leaking showerhead	10 drips/minute	1.4	43	.05
In-ground irrigation	1/32" in diameter (about the thickness of a dime)	210	6,300	8
Overflow tube in toilet tank	1/4" in diameter	7,200-8,640	216,600-259,200	290-347
A garden hose left running or a missing sprinkler head	1/2" in diameter	14,440-17,280	433,200-518,400	579-693