Water Metering
Frequently Asked Questions

WATER METERS ON THE SUNSHINE COAST

Q. What is a water meter?

A. A water meter is a device that measures the volume of water used at a property, whether it is residential, commercial, or agricultural.

Q. What are the benefits of water metering?

A. Water metering plays a key role in ensuring a safe and reliable water supply for the community in the long term.

The SCRD water meter program:

- **Promotes water efficiency and conservation**. Water metering is broadly accepted as a best management practice for water demand management.
- **Helps with early leak detection**, preventing property damage and water losses. In 2020, residential properties with a water leak unknowingly used about 4 times more water than the average home.
- **Can offset costs**. Water metering costs money, but so does treating and distributing water, and expanding our water supply. We need to continue balancing supply and demand to improve the resiliency of our current water system.
- **Offers the opportunity for fair billing**. With volumetric billing, you only pay for what you use.

Q. What areas of the Sunshine Coast have water meters?

A. The Town of Gibsons was the first area on the Sunshine Coast to implement water metering. In 2014 and 2015, the SCRD installed the first water meters for properties in Pender Harbour. In 2017 and 2018, installations were completed in the rural Electoral Areas of Halfmoon Bay, Roberts Creek, Elphinstone, West Howe Sound (excluding Hopkins Landing), Egmont and Earls Cove.

Most residential properties in the Sechelt area do not have meters.

Q. Are new developments and population growth the reason we need water meters?

A. No, water meters would be part of an integrated approach to water with or without population growth. The SCRD continues to analyze and estimate future water demand in the region, and plan accordingly. There are several water supply projects underway to help expand the current system. In addition, the SCRD will review the relevant water bylaws and seek public input on ways to limit the impacts of growth on water demand, to ensure we can meet the needs of residents now and in the future.

Q. There are multiple dwellings on my property, can I have multiple meters?

A. For properties with water meters, the SCRD has installed a water meter at every service connection. In most cases, properties will have one service connection and one meter.

Q. Was the public consulted about implementing water metering?

A. The SCRD Board adopted the Comprehensive Regional Water Plan in 2013, which sets the direction and priorities for drinking water initiatives, including increasing water supply in combination with metering to manage demand. A public engagement process was held in 2013 leading up to the adoption of this plan. Residents were provided the opportunity to complete a survey or attend open houses to provide input, including water metering to manage water demand. Most respondents were in favour of water metering.

WATER CONSERVATION

Q. How much water is saved using a water meter?

A. It is common for communities to reduce water use by 20 to 30% after water meters are installed, because of leak repairs and changes in water consumption habits.

- A Canadian study[1] found metered properties with volume-based water charges used less water than unmetered properties.
- After water meters were installed:
    - The Town of Gibsons' per capita demand fell by 40%, and
    - West Vancouver saw a 30% reduction during the summer season.

Q. Is the SCRD actively fixing water main leaks?

A. The SCRD is continuously improving water main monitoring to increase efficiency. There are a variety of tools to monitor and detect water main leaks, including notifications from residents and water meter data. However, small leaks can be difficult to detect if they are not visible, and for this reason, some undetected leakage can be expected. A leak correlator will be piloted in 2021 to support further leak detection in water mains.

[1] Environment Canada. (2011). 2011 Municipal water use report: Municipal water use 2009 statistics. Government of Canada.

THE COST OF WATER

Q. Will my water bill change?

A. The SCRD is not currently proposing changes to utility rates. If water meters are installed on all properties using SCRD water, the SCRD Board could direct staff to engage the public on options for potential changes to the rate structure. Currently, the SCRD is using water meters to identify leaks and provide water use data to residents.

Q. Why do I pay for water?

A. The SCRD charges the public for water use like any utility or service. There are costs associated with the treatment and supply of clean and safe drinking water, such as:

- Construction and capital investments in our drinking water system
- Maintenance, repair and replacement of pipes, pumps, reservoirs and other infrastructure
- Operations, including staffing and energy (electricity) costs, and
- Materials for the treatment process.

Q. How will the SCRD fund metering installations?

A. A significant portion of the funding for the first two phases of the metering project was provided by provincial and federal grants. To pay for the remaining waters meters within the Sechelt area, the SCRD Board authorized staff to seek the community's permission for a long-term loan through an Alternative Approval Process (AAP).

The SCRD will continue to review grant opportunities and consider alternate funding sources that may become available.

Q. Who pays for water meter maintenance?

A. The SCRD maintains water meters in the region. Customer water use data is reviewed monthly to ensure that SCRD water meters are recording information within the standard accuracy range and for potential leaks. SCRD Utility Services will respond to reported water meter problems and cover maintenance costs unless the meter has been tampered with.

Q. Shouldn't we spend money on increasing supply instead?

A. Yes, the SCRD is working on several water supply projects to increase supply in the region. These include groundwater and exploring a potential raw water reservoir to capture more precipitation during the winter months. The Comprehensive Regional Water Plan and other studies developed for the SCRD and the broader water sector continue to indicate that conservation and increasing the efficiency of the water system through metering is an affordable option. For this reason, the SCRD's approach for ensuring sustainable drinking water now and in the future includes both expanding our current supply and implementing water conservation strategies.

DATA COLLECTION

Q. How do you collect the data?

A. The installed water meters have a transmitter that uses radio frequency communication technology certified by Industry Canada. This technology is similar to other small household appliances, such as cordless phones, garage door openers, internet routers, and remote controls. The transmitter is designed to avoid interference with other devices.

Residents have the option of a touch-pad meter, which costs $25 per read up to a maximum of $300 per year, as outlined in Bylaw 422. You can contact the SCRD for more information at 604-885-6806.

Q. How does the SCRD know that water meters are reading accurately?

A. The SCRD uses meters that meet or exceed the American Water Works Association (AWWA) C700 Standard, and have a field-proven record of accuracy, reliability, and long-lasting performance.

Q. How can I receive my water meter data?

A. The SCRD reads water meter data once per month from the roadway to collect:

1) Total water consumption and;
2) Check for leaks.

If you have a water meter, sign up for a monthly update of average daily water use at your property by contacting infrastructure@scrd.ca and include:

- First and Last Name
- Water Account Number
- Email Address

Q. Will water meters affect my property?

A. Water meters have backflow preventers that protect the water system from potential contamination by ensuring that water from the household or other activities does not flow back into the distribution system. Backflow preventers also stop the release of pressure from household plumbing into the SCRD distribution system.

Modern plumbing can accommodate pressure fluctuations; however, occasionally older hot water tanks, plumbing, and toilets may leak or fail if not equipped with pressure relief systems. Homeowners should ensure that their hot water tank has a pressure relief valve and is properly maintained. If your plumbing is old, a certified plumber can help determine your needs.

Visit to learn more https://letstalk.scrd.ca/water-metering