

# What is a Water Meter?

By Nick Jackson  
West River Circuit Rider

Water meters are most often defined as the utility's cash register. They are generally owned, read and maintained by the public water provider such as a city, town, rural water system or private water entity. A water meter is a device used to measure the volume of water used by consumers. By measuring the amount of water consumed, the utility can properly bill the user the correct amount due and account for that usage in water conservation calculations (water loss). Why is it important to accurately read your water meters? Money! The meter or "cash register" funds the entire water system infrastructure, from source to tap. To be fair, the utility should maintain meter accuracy as close to 100% as financially feasible. Over the years, we have found many small

systems collecting their readings from the customer's remote reader unit, which on occasion is not the correct reading.

Remote readers are mechanical devices that rely upon a magnetic signal from the water meter through a wire to the remote device. They are reliable for the most part, but under some cases they are not, and over a period of time they can be several thousand gallons off. Since water rates are set to ensure sufficient revenues to operate the system, it is only fair to all customers that each and every meter, and drop of water, is accurate and properly accounted for. This means that the utility should read the water meter and then match the remote figures to those on the water meter to maintain accuracy and good public relations. How often should this check and balance take place? Depends on how often your utility has discovered discrepancies.

Another reason why you'd want to read the actual water meter deals with good public relations. Most users have difficulty determining if they have a possible leak within their residence. Many water meters have a leak indicator on the face of the meter dial. Generally it is a triangular or diamond shaped indicator that turns when water passes through the meter. If water is not being used, the indicator should not be moving, if it is turning, check for a leak. Ask your billing clerk to check monthly abnormal water usage, low or high, it may indicate a remote read-out has stopped or a small leak (toilet flapper valve stuck) has occurred. Either way you will be providing a fair service to the customer.

As water technicians and specialists, it's our job to maintain the systems infrastructure and that includes watching over the always important water meter.

## Commitment

CoBank is proud to be a strong and consistent financial partner to the rural water industry. We are committed to continuing to support this vital industry, and to helping ensure that America's rural communities have access to safe and reliable water.

To learn more about CoBank, please call us at 800-542-8072 or visit [www.cobank.com](http://www.cobank.com).



**David Dornbirer**  
Division Manager  
Water & Environmental  
Services Division  
[dornbid@cobank.com](mailto:dornbid@cobank.com)  
303-694-5848



**Jim Maras**  
Vice President  
Water & Environmental  
Services Division  
[jmaras@cobank.com](mailto:jmaras@cobank.com)  
303-793-2168