

Automatic Meter Reading and Meter Replacement Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Please note: This project will take place over the next five years. During that time, each neighborhood will receive letters indicating that you need to make an appointment within two weeks.

You will not be able to schedule your appointment until you receive your installation letter that gives you a Work Order # and Service #.

The Town of Salem will initiate its automated meter replacement program in October 2012. Most of the Town's current meters are close to 20 years old and the readings are collected via an outdated, labor-intensive manual system. The new automated meter reading program will install new, more accurate meters that can be read via radio frequencies that send consumption data directly to the Town Water Department for billing. This system also has the capability of providing leak detection, both within the Town's water distribution system and within individual homes and businesses.

The Town has hired Bridgewater Winwater Services (BSW) of Brockton, Massachusetts to install the new Neptune water meters and associated radio transmitters provided by Ti-Sales, Inc of Sudbury, Massachusetts. The new system will ensure the Town is measuring water consumption accurately for billing purposes and will continue to promote water conservation. This also enables the Town to comply with applicable industry standards for water metering and billing.

What is an AMR Project?

The AMR Project really means Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) and Meter Replacement Program. This five year town-wide project will replace old meters with new, state of the art meters that will allow the Town of Salem to obtain meter readings without coming to your home.

Is there a charge for this service?

No. The meter and remote are being replaced at no charge to the customer. We just ask for a little bit of your time to allow us access to your home.

Where is my water meter?

Your water meter is most likely located in your basement or crawl space, usually along the front wall of your house, where your water service enters from the street.

Why do I need a new meter?

The majority of existing meters in Salem are close to 20 years old. The new meters will transmit the water meter readings directly to the Water Billing Department and accurately report your consumption daily. This will provide more accurate usage amounts reported and in turn more accurate bills for the water you are actually using.

When will my meter be replaced?

This project is being done in sections around town over the time period. You will be notified by a letter from BWS when they are ready for you to schedule an appointment. You cannot make an appointment without this letter and the Work Order and Service # that are assigned to you.

Once you receive your letter, please make your appointment by calling BWS toll-free at 1-866-983-8080 Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Or, log on to <http://www.winwatersrvs.com/salem-nh/> and enter your Work Order and Service # from your letter into the top right hand corner boxes. The available hours for installation are Monday – Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. or Saturday 7:30 a.m. – 4:10 p.m.

In order to minimize water billing issues, it is important that you schedule your appointment within two weeks of receiving your letter.

How does the new meter reading system work?

The meter readings will be sent daily from a transmitter at your home via several data collection units located throughout the Town. A server, located in the Town Hall, will collect all readings in the Town. These readings will be used for your actual billing, whether it is monthly or quarterly.

Will anything else need to be installed?

In addition to the new water meter, a gray radio transmitter, which will send your meter's consumption data to the Water Department, will be placed on the outside of your home (typically in the same location as the current remote device). New wiring between the meter and the transmitter will need to be installed.

Will my water bill go up?

Older meters tend to run slower and therefore do not measure all the water going through them. The new water meter will accurately measure even the smallest amounts of water that the old meters were not capable of registering. All new meters are tested at the factory to ensure that they register properly. If you see a higher bill, it is not because your new meter is reading too high; it is because the old meter was running slow. The Town will not back bill customers because their old meter was running slow, but all customers with new meters will now pay for their actual usage.

Will the timing of my water bills change?

There will be no change to your quarterly or monthly billing period at this time. Your first bill after the new meter is installed will show and bill you for the consumption on your old meter to the point it was removed. And, then, the new meter starting at zero to whatever it reads when we read for your billing cycle. Subsequent months/quarters will, as in the past, show usage and bill you for the active meter.

How do I know that you have my reading and not someone else's?

Each radio frequency device has a unique identification number, which is transmitted along with the meter reading. The unique identification number is compared to your account record to ensure that there is a match.

How do you know that my reading is accurate?

These state of the art water meters have electronic registers which verifies the meter reading three times before it is sent to the transmitting unit. This reading is deemed more accurate than visually reading the meter.

How do I know if higher usage may be a result of a leak in my plumbing system?

A new, more accurate meter may detect small leaks that the older meter missed, including continuous flow recordings late at night, between the hours of 2 and 5 a.m., when water usage is typically non-existent.

In the bottom display portion on your meter, you may see a faucet with a drip. You will need to shine a flashlight directly on the meter to read it. If the faucet is not showing, there is no leak being detected. If it is flashing, an intermittent leak is detected. Meaning water has been used for at least 50 of the 96 15-minute

intervals during the past 24 hour period. If the faucet is showing continuously, it indicates there has been water use for all 96 15-minute intervals in the past 24 hour period.

If you suspect a leak, check faucets for small drips. Also, check your toilet tank for small leaks in the toilet bowl. Place a few drops of food coloring in your toilet tank. If the water in the bowl changes to the color of the dye used in the tank, you have a leak. Seek assistance from a plumbing professional to fix all such leaks.

Do I have to be home for the meter to be installed?

Yes. Someone over the age of 18 must be home to allow the installers access to the existing meter and sign for the verification and approval of the installation.

How long will the meter installation take?

Under normal circumstances, the installation will take about 30 minutes. The water will need to be turned off until the meter is changed. Please be advised that there may be some trapped air or slight discoloration in the water line that may result from the change out. This will clear up after running your water for a few minutes. You may hear some noise as the air exits spigots and fixtures. This is normal.

What will they do inside my house?

Generally the installer will locate your water meter, remove the old meter, install the new meter and run wire along the wall or foundation to a point outside your home or business. They will then remove your old remote on the outside of your home and attach the transmitting unit and clean up the area.

Is there a hazard from the radio transmitter in my home?

No. The radio signal is only on when the meter reading takes place. This is less than a few seconds per month and typically takes place at night. The power level is far below that where any risk occurs.

If there anything hazardous inside the equipment?

No. Only ordinary electronics and batteries are inside the equipment.

Will the radio interfere with my television, cordless phone or pacemaker?

No. The radio transmissions occur on a licensed frequency dedicated to the Water Department which is very different from those used by television signals, cordless phones and pacemakers. In addition, the transmissions last less than a few seconds each month. You will never see interference with your television reception.

How will I know your installer works for you?

All installers will be BWS employees and they will arrive at your home or business in clearly identified vehicles, wear BWS company shirts and have town photo ID badges, indicating they are authorized to do this work for the Town.

Who should I call if I would like more information about the AMR Project itself? For installation or equipment questions, please call the Water Treatment Plant at (603) 890-2171. For commercial billing questions, please call (603) 890-2042, or residential billing questions, please call at (603) 890-2047.

Why are we going to a new system?

To provide a more accurate recording of water consumption and a more cost effective way of transmitting that consumption data to the Water Department. In addition, this program will improve the Town's water infrastructure and increase our ability to respond to customer inquiries.

This program is also a continuation of the Town's effort to go green as meter readers will no longer need to visit each meter to get consumption data. Also, leaks in the water system or in individual homes or businesses will be identified very quickly, and overall billing will become more efficient.

How do I prepare for the installation?

By removing anything close to your water meter and outside reading device so the installers have room to work. Also, be prepared to have the water supply off during the installation and plan accordingly.

What happens if I refuse to have my meter replaced?

This is a mandatory project. There will be three letters sent from BWS to you asking you to schedule an appointment. These letters will be sent over a six to eight week period. If there is still no response after the third letter is sent, the Town will generate a certified letter giving you until a specific date to comply or your water will be shut off. (§304-7.D3 of the Town Municipal Code)

Once you have scheduled an appointment, your water will be turned back on. There will be shut off and turn on fees applicable to this process. If you cancel a scheduled appointment at this time, you may be fined in addition to the water being turned off again and being charged for that service. (§304-7.C)

My water can't be shut off because my heating system will be affected?

Yes, your water can be turned off and your heating system will continue to run. Most systems are an enclosed, recycled water system where the water cycles through your boiler, out to your heating pipes and back into your boiler.

What about plumbing from the meter to my house?

In rare cases, BWS may find that some plumbing repairs will be required prior to meter installation. The customer is responsible for the water service on their property (typically from the shut-off valve at the edge of the right-of-way, with exception of the meter and meter horn assembly, up to, and including, the plumbing inside the building). If defective plumbing or deteriorated pipes prevent the meter replacement, the customer will be required to hire a licensed plumber and make the necessary repairs.

What if I have two meters, one for my lawn and one for my inside use? Will I continue to have two meters?

Yes, if you currently have two meters, you will continue to have two meters. Nothing will change in that respect.

What if I don't have town water, but have a meter?

If you currently have a meter that is read by the Town, it will need to be replaced. If your meter is for measuring usage of your well water for charging you for sewer, that will continue. The new meter will still measure water used by your well and we will bill you for sewer usage based on that consumption.