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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

# Procedure

<b>Title</b> Expansion Tank Billing Adjustment for Retail Customers	<b>Number</b> CS-327	<b>Rev. no.</b> 0
<b>Responsibility</b> Customer Care Division; Risk & Quality Assurance Division	<b>Supersedes</b> N/A	<b>Pages</b> 5
<b>General Manager/CEO signature</b>  /s/ Andrew Lee	<b>Approval date</b>  Apr 18, 2023	<b>Effective date</b>  May 1, 2023

**A. PURPOSE**

This procedure establishes the steps for granting billing adjustments to inaccurate metering due to the presence of a thermal expansion tank in an open-plumbing system.

**B. SCOPE**

This rule applies to Customer Care Division and the Risk and Quality Assurance Division.

**C. DEFINITIONS**

*Billing adjustments.* Forms of adjustments applied to a customer’s account in situations when the customer has not been billed, or has been undercharged, or overcharged for services rendered. A billing adjustment is any financial transaction that is neither a bill nor a payment (i.e., refund). This is the process of assessing fees and applying credits to an account balance or the cancellation of such fees or credits. Billing adjustments do not cancel an original transaction that is followed by the creation of a new transaction (rebill).

*Check valve.* A device that only allows water to move in one direction as it flows through a plumbing system. The presence of a functioning check valve creates a closed plumbing system and can help reduce water metering accuracy impacts that are created when water flows back and forth through a water meter (See appendix).

*Closed plumbing system.* A plumbing system that prevents water from flowing in the reverse direction (i.e., water that does not flow back into city lines once it enters the home’s pipes).

*Open plumbing system.* A plumbing system that does not have a check valve or similar device preventing water from flowing back into the supply line and eventually into the meter if the pressure is high enough.

*Thermal expansion tank.* An additional small tank that is attached to the water supply pipe of the water heater. The expansion tank is designed to handle the thermal expansion of water as it heats up in the water heater, preventing excessive water pressure. A thermal expansion tank is not required on water heaters installed in Seattle, except where the water heater is installed in a closed plumbing system.

*Customer.* An owner of residential or commercial property within SPU’s retail water, wastewater, drainage, and solid waste service area as defined in Director’s Rule [FIN-160](#), Customer Account and Billing Management.

*High consumption:* A property's higher-than-average metered water consumption as evidenced by a customer's utility service bill. Per CS-325 Leak Adjustment for Retail Customer Director's Rule, higher than average water consumption is considered approximately 50 percent or more than the previous year's usage for the same period.

*Normal consumption:* The customer's consumption levels for the same billing period from the prior year. If prior water consumption data is not available, SPU may consider post-repair consumption or best available data.

#### **D. GENERAL PROCEDURES**

1. Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) is not responsible for any adverse impacts on an SPU water meter's performance due to the presence of a private thermal expansion tank on an open water system. If left unremedied, a hydraulic environment caused by water flowing in both directions on the meter's register may prevent the meter from accurately reflecting the actual water supplied to the property.
2. Customers who are affected by the [Backflow Prevention and Cross Connection Control](#) program are likely to have additional requirements prior to being approved for a billing adjustment. For example, such customers may not have the option to remove their expansion tank and/or check valve. For more information about this program, contact [SPU\\_Backflow@seattle.gov](mailto:SPU_Backflow@seattle.gov) or 206-684-3536.
3. If a customer complies with the requirements outlined in section E and demonstrates the increase in water usage resulting from the presence of a thermal expansion tank installed on the customer's private open plumbing system, SPU may, at its sole discretion, adjust 100 percent of the above-normal consumption after the resulting hydraulic issues are resolved, through either of the following:
  - Installation and registration of a check valve or appropriate device (see appendix).
  - Removal of an errantly installed expansion tank on an open plumbing system.
4. If an agent is acting as a representative of the owner, such as a tenant, property manager or administrator, the owner must authorize the agent through a signed letter or an email before SPU will process the billing adjustment. The owner is not relieved of the responsibility for any outstanding, unpaid charges on the account.
5. Expansion tank adjustments may be made once per calendar year for a maximum of two billing periods, or a total of four months unless delays in resolution occur due to an estimated read, untimely billing or an SPU error that warrant exercise of waiver in accordance with FIN-160, Customer Account and Billing Management and CS-340, Waivers for Retail Customers.
6. Nothing in this procedure changes the responsibility of the property owner to maintain service pipe connections and water appurtenances as referenced in SMC 21.04.

#### **E. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR EXPANSION TANK BILLING ADJUSTMENT**

Customers will be responsible for the following:

- Contact SPU at 206-684-3000 within 60 days of the initial notification from SPU of increased usage caused by an expansion tank or backflow device.
- Perform the necessary repairs within six months of the receipt of the initial high utility bill unless the customer can prove unusual circumstances.
- If a prior bill is estimated or additional time is needed, request an extension.
- Provide receipts, invoices and photo documentation demonstrating that the check valve or similar device is properly installed, or that an errantly installed expansion tank on an open plumbing system has been removed.

SPU staff will be responsible for the following:

- Provide and educate customers with information to help identify the underlying source of the high consumption and steps that need to be taken to be eligible for an adjustment.
- Review the proof of repairs and confirm water consumption levels have returned to normal based on two verified reads by SPU. If this does not occur, SPU staff will notify the customer to further investigate for other possible on-property leakage or undetected high-water usage.
- Review adjustment accuracy and billing computations, set up pay arrangement/pay plan for customers, and address any other outstanding account issues.
- Document the required customer information outlined in Section G and summarize what was discussed.

**F. CALCULATION METHODOLOGY**

After confirming the requirements under section E are satisfied, SPU staff will adjust utility service charges as follows for a maximum of two billing periods, or a total of four months, unless an extension is authorized due to SPU delay or error.

Customer Class	Water	Sewer
Residential	100 percent	100 percent
Commercial	100 percent	100 percent

The final adjustment amount will be communicated to the customer in writing and reflected in SPU billing.

**G. DOCUMENTATION AND EXPECTATIONS**

Customer Care Division job aids may be created for technical reference by staff. The Utility Account Services Manager oversees the job aids and ensures compliance with Director’s Rule FIN-160, Customer Account and Billing Management. A list of job aids will be stored on the division’s internal resource sites.

A billing adjustment requires appropriate documentation including, but not limited to:

- Nature of the adjustment
- Justification for the adjustment
- Investigations and communication by the lines of business with customers, contractors, or developers
- Findings and decisions

Creating and retaining records that document what transpired, including, but are not limited to:

- System notes that summarize the chronology of events
- Spreadsheet(s) showing the calculations
- Electronic record exchanges between SPU and the customer
- Copy of the customer’s written dispute
- Any other supporting documentation submitted that captures the amount of the refund sought or outcome desired

Retention of records shall comply with City of Seattle and State of Washington retention schedule.

**H. AUTHORITY/REFERENCES**

- Director’s Rule FIN-160, Customer Account and Billing Management
- Director’s Rule CS-390, Dispute Escalation for Retail Customers
- Procedure CS-320, Billing Adjustments for Retail and Wholesale Customer
- Seattle Municipal Code 21.04.030 – Contract City Non-Liability
- Seattle Municipal Code 21.04.250 – Charges – Delinquencies and Lien
- Seattle Municipal Code 21.04.260 – Accounts to be in name of Owner or Leaseholder
- Seattle Municipal Code 21.04.310 – Owner’s Responsibility for Maintenance
- Seattle Municipal Code 21.04.320 – Wasting Water and other unlawful uses
- Uniform Plumbing Code, Section 608.3
- Seattle Plumbing Code
- Appendix, Expansion Tank Diagram

**APPENDIX: Expansion Tank Diagram**

