


<b>Title</b> Customer Account and Billing Management		<b>Number</b> FIN-160	<b>Rev. no.</b> 1
<b>Responsibility</b> Finance and Risk Services Branch		<b>Supersedes</b> N/A	<b>Pages</b> 4
<b>General Manager/CEO (interim) signature</b>  <small>Andrew Lee (Jan 7, 2022 18:58 PST)</small>	<b>Approval date</b> Jan 7, 2022	<b>Effective date</b> January 11, 2022	

## 1. PURPOSE

This Director's Rule provides a framework of uniform and equitable rules which guide billing by Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) in accordance with state and local laws and organizational goals and objectives.

This Director's Rule applies to all manner of billing generated by SPU for services provided to both internal and external customers. It does not apply to recovery of legal claims.

If any part of this Director's Rule or any associated policy and/or procedure conflicts with any applicable contractual agreement, the contractual agreement shall prevail. The remaining non-conflicting features of this Rule shall remain in effect.

Customers are provided the associated procedures upon request and when available.

## 2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

SPU is responsible for:

- Issuing timely and accurate bills.
- Reviewing bills for accuracy and making necessary corrections.
- Adjusting bills for overbilling and underbilling consistent with this rule and associated procedures.
- Providing professional, courteous, and timely investigation and response to customer requests for assistance with account and billing questions.
- Applying consistently and uniformly applying SPU's billing Director's Rules, policies and procedures.

Customers are responsible for:

- Providing accurate information to establish and maintain service including a change in address or property owner.
- Notifying SPU in a timely manner when:
  - A bill is not received.
  - A bill is noticeably inaccurate or is otherwise disputed.
  - The payment responsibility changes.
  - Service changes are not reflected in the billing statement.
- Submitting payment in a timely manner by the due date.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

*Billing adjustments.* Forms of adjustments applied to a customer's account in situations when the customer has been undercharged or overcharged for services rendered.

*Debit.* A form of billing adjustment made to correct a customer's account to collect undercharges. A debit adjustment is also known as a backbill or retroactive adjustment.

*Credit.* A form of billing adjustment made to correct a customer's account to reduce overcharges.

*Customer.* For the purposes of this rule:

- An owner or tenant of residential or commercial property within SPU's retail water, wastewater, drainage, and solid waste service area.
- Wholesale customers who purchase water from Seattle for the purpose of reselling water to their retail customers.
- Developers or property owners who obtain new or changed water, solid waste, drainage and wastewater utility services within SPU's service area.
- Other individuals or entities (such as consultants, contractors, or City departments) whose billing is processed by SPU's Accounting Division.

*Timely.* Predefined deadlines and windows as set forth in specific SPU Director's Rules, policies and procedures.

### 4. RULE

#### A. Billing for Services

SPU sets charges and fees for water, drainage, wastewater and solid waste utility services. These are updated regularly and at varying intervals depending on type of utility service and mechanism. Charges and fees are either approved by City Council and codified in the Seattle Municipal Code or set via Director's Rules by the General Manager / Chief Executive Officer.

All current Director's Rules and policies can be found on SPU's [Director's Rule and Policies website](#).

#### B. Payment Methods

Payments may be made by cash, check, debit or credit card. SPU does not charge convenience fees for debit or credit card payments. Payments may be made by mail, online, at area [Customer Service Centers](#), or through the 24-hour automated phone line @ 1-877-398-3531.

#### C. Returned Payment

Fees will be charged when a payment is returned by a bank or other financial institution.

#### D. Late Fees and Interest

Late fees and interest will be assessed as a flat fee or percentage to a customer's account when the amount of the account becomes delinquent.

E. Extended Payment Terms

Payment terms may be offered to customers depending on specific circumstance.

F. Utility Assistance Programs

Customers seeking financial assistance are offered the following programs:

- [Utility Discount Program](#) offers a 50 percent discount on a customer's residential utility bill.
- [Emergency Assistance Program](#) offers a billing reduction to customers who are in shut-off process for water services.

G. Billing Adjustments

A backbill or credit adjustment may be applied for service overcharges to a customer's account for a maximum of three (3) years when specific services remain unbilled, or the customer has underpaid or overpaid for services rendered. The three-year adjustment will be made from the date of discovery of the discrepancy.

Retail customers should refer to CS-320, Billing Adjustments for Retail and Wholesale Customers, for information on billing methodologies and the time frame of adjustments for utility service charges. Developers, wholesale customers, and contractors will refer to their respective contractual agreements for details on billing methodologies and adjustments.

H. Leak Adjustments

Certain water leaks may be eligible for a leak adjustment provided qualification criteria and administrative processes are followed.

I. Refunds

Money returned to a customer, escrow company or other third party will be in the form of a physical check or credit card refund.

J. Appeals and Disputes

Customers who have questions, complaints, disputes regarding bill charges or concerns about utility actions are entitled to be heard and given a fair and timely response. The following are the most common procedures to initiate a billing dispute:

- [Customer Billing and Service Disputes Within the Customer Service Branch - Retail](#)
- [Utility Main Extension Dispute Process](#)
- [Wholesale Water Customers Metering and Billing Dispute Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Third-Tier Water Rate Appeal Process](#)

K. Waivers

SPU generally does not provide waivers of charges because it has a statutory duty to collect for services provided and to keep charges uniform for the same class of customers.

The following are generally not eligible for waivers:

- Theft
- Vandalism
- Fraud
- System tampering
- Customer disregard of SPU advice
- Customer negligence

L. Unclaimed Property

SPU will send written notice to the last known address for credit balances of \$75 or more. Credit balances on inactive accounts with no activity or contact for more than one year will be remitted to the State of Washington according to RCW 63.29.

M. Liens

Actions for nonpayment may be made and include enforcement of SPU's lien-rights. See section E, Extended Payment Terms to meet your needs.

N. Authority to Grant Exceptions

In limited and exceptional circumstances, when it is in the best interests of the utility and to prevent unreasonable and unintended penalties to the customer, the General Manager / Chief Executive Officer or authorized designee may make exceptions to time limits, dollar thresholds and other billing requirements. In such instances, the General Manager / Chief Executive Officer or authorized designee will document in writing the circumstances and reasoning for the exception.

**5. AUTHORITY/REFERENCES**

- RCW 57.08.081, Rates and Charges – Delinquencies
- RCW 60.80.020 – Seller's Duty to inform closing agent; Payment of Final Billing
- RCW 63.29 – Uniform Unclaimed Property Act
- RCW 60 – Liens
- SMC 21.04.310 – Water Rates and Regulations
- SMC 21.33 – Storm Drainage and Utility Rates and Charges
- SMC 21.40 – Solid Waste Rates and Charges