

PUBLIC FIRE PROTECTION CHARGES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of a Water Utility?

A Water Utility has three basic functions: 1) Furnishing water for consumption; 2) Furnishing water for sanitation; and 3) Capability to deliver water for fighting fires.

2. What is the Public Fire Protection Charge?

This charge is required by State law and regulated by the State of Wisconsin's Public Service Commission. It recovers the cost of water for fighting fires and the extra capacity built into the system to rapidly deliver a large volume of water to fight a fire anywhere within the Water Utility's service area. These costs include a portion of wells, pumps, storage facilities, water mains, hydrants, and an estimated quantity of water used for this purpose.

3. How has Public Fire Protection been paid for in the past?

The Village had previously used property tax dollars to subsidize the Water Utility for the Public Fire Protection facilities in the Village of Ellsworth to maintain a lower cost of water service for residents and businesses currently connected to the system.

4. Why is this fee on my Utility Bill?

Due to budget constraints and state-imposed property tax levy limits the Village can no longer afford to subsidize the Water Utility through the use of general property taxes. Utility customers now pay for a service that was previously subsidized by only Village of Ellsworth property taxpayers. All utility customers are treated equally, and tax-exempt properties also pay for their share of the Public Fire Protection costs.

5. Isn't this a cost that should be borne by the Fire Department and not the Utility customers? Isn't this why I pay taxes?

This charge has nothing to do with the costs of operating the Ellsworth Area Fire Department. The Public Fire Protection Charge covers the costs of the Ellsworth Water Utility to be able to deliver water for fighting fires and is completely independent of any expenses that the Ellsworth Area Fire Department may incur in order to use the water to fight the fire.

6. What costs does the Public Fire Protection Charge specifically cover?

Although hydrants are an important part of the cost, there are other expenses, such as increased sizes of water mains, increased pump capacity, and increased storage capacity (water towers & reservoirs), that all must be in place to supply water to fight a fire. These things must be in place to make sure the Water Utility has enough capacity to provide water for fighting fires and still supply daily water needs at the same time. If the water system was not used to fight fires, the system would cost the utility significantly less to operate and maintain due to smaller mains, pumps, and storage tanks.

7. I have multiple meters; will I receive a charge for every meter?

Any meter providing general service WILL receive the Public Fire Protection charge. If your property has an extra/special meter for irrigation purposes only and a meter for domestic water use, the extra/special meter WILL NOT receive the Public Fire Protection charge.

8. Do other municipalities have a Public Fire Protection Charge?

In the area multiple municipal utilities charge utility customers for the Public Fire Protection, including the cities of Prescott, River Falls, Hudson, and New Richmond and the villages of Hammond,

Somerset, and Spring Valley.

9. How is the amount of the Public Fire Protection charge determined?

The Public Service Commission has approved using the equivalent meters method to calculate the amount of the Public Fire Protection charge. Under this method, the rate paid by each customer is based on the size of their water meter and service. Customers such as businesses and schools with larger water services will pay a proportionally larger charge for Public Fire Protection.

10. Does the Public Fire Protection Charge apply to Tax Exempt Properties?

Yes, all utility customers are responsible for paying the Public Fire Protection Charge, including churches, schools, and government entities as allowed by Wis. Stat. § 196.03(3)(b). Each utility customer pays the same rate as any other customer with the same meter size.

11. What will my charge be for Public Fire Protection?

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin has determined that the following rates will apply.

Quarterly Public Fire Protection charges by Water Meter Size

Meter Size (in.)	Quarterly Rate	Meter Size	Quarterly Rate
5/8	\$34.35	3	\$516.00
3/4	\$34.35	4	\$858.00
1	\$85.80	6	\$1,716.00
1 1/4	\$127.80	8	\$2,745.00
1 1/2	\$171.00	10	\$4,119.00
2	\$276.00	12	\$2,331.00

*Residential meters are typically 5/8" or 3/4" with limited exceptions