



UP THE CREEK
May 1, 2010

Since the meter reading season has begun, a month later than what is customary, we anticipate that there will be questions from our esteemed customers concerning the arcane details of how water meters work, and how we come up with the preposterous number of gallons used and the preposterous water bills computed upon those alleged gallons. We know that other water companies may

take the position that you can just darn well shut up and pay. We've tinkered with that concept ourselves. But in the end we opted for the kinder, gentler approach that leads to better customer relations, tranquility, and financial ruin.

Pictured at right are the faces of two different brands of water meters used in our system. (If you look down into your meter pit and don't see anything resembling these, flip open the little lid on the meter, it helps.) As you can see, these two meters are superficially different, but basically the same. There are three significant indicating parts: the leak indicator, the sweep hand, and the odometer. All three move when water is passing through the meter. Contrary to the beliefs of some, they do not move when water is not passing through the meter.

When a small amount of water flows, such as a drippy faucet or singing toilet, the leak indicator revolves even if no other part seems to move. Increase the flow, and you will see the sweep hand moving around the dial. In this example, one full revolution indicates ten gallons. Some meters still in place on our system do not have the sweep hand.

On the odometer, the right-hand number clicks over with each ten gallons passing through the meter. Oops, that statement isn't completely true. The *furthest* right-hand number, the zero, is permanently painted on and doesn't move at all. A few meters have a double zero painted on, which means the odometer clicks ahead with each 100 gallons.

To calculate the number of gallons used between two readings, you subtract the earlier odometer reading from the later one. In this example if the top meter is today's reading, and the bottom meter was the reading a month ago then 89,040 gallons went through the meter in one month. Since that equates to a water bill of \$567, we are grateful that this is just an exercise.

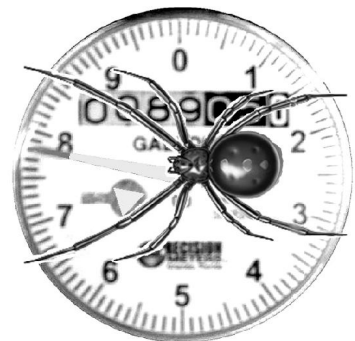
We haven't presented the whole story of meter reading. Obviously, the opportunities for human error abound - from reading the neighbor's meter for yours, to juxtaposition of numbers, to reclining in the shade and inventing numbers - anything is possible. That's why we will always work with you to resolve a controversial meter reading. Keep in mind that the pretty pictures above represent the best possible case. They were generated from photographs of nice clean meters sitting out in broad daylight.

In reality, the meter reader, after ripping his jeans on the fence, falling into the rosebush, and escaping from the dog, peers into the dark pit to be confronted with something like this:

OR



THIS!



dh

