

Watercare's debt management code of practice

1. Debt management code of practice

Our debt management code of practice explains the process we will undertake if you do not pay your bill by the due date. It also details how we can help if you are having difficulty paying your bill.

We want to help customers facing financial difficulty to manage their payment commitments so they can maintain full access to water supply and avoid paying additional collection costs. We explain how we can help customers in financial difficulty in section four of this document.

We encourage customers to read this code of practice to understand their responsibility to pay their bills on time and the consequences should they fail to meet this responsibility. The actions we will take if customers do not pay on time are set out in section five of this document.

2. Why it matters that we get paid

We provide our services at the lowest possible cost. Our company does not operate to make a profit and we are prohibited by law from paying a dividend to our shareholder, Auckland Council.

3. Paying your water bill

Your bill is due 21 days after the date on your bill. Any balance unpaid after the due date may incur an administration fee of \$8.00 or 1% of the overdue balance, per month or part of a month, whichever is greater.

We require that you communicate promptly if you believe your bill is incorrect or you have other issues with your bill which mean you will not be paying on the due date.

We attempt to make paying your bill as easy as possible and have a number of payment channels available to you. You can find information about all of the ways to pay on our [website](#).

4. Assisting you to pay your water account

If you are likely to struggle to pay your bill by the due date, please contact us as soon as possible, preferably before it becomes overdue. You can contact us by phone at (09) 442 2222 or email info@water.co.nz.

We will discuss your bill with you to understand your individual circumstances. As a result of these discussions we may recommend you take one of the following actions:

- Organise a payment arrangement to repay the amount due over a period of up to three months. In certain circumstances payment arrangements may be granted for longer periods.

- If you are a residential customer and meet certain other conditions you may apply to the Water Utility Consumer Assistance Trust for financial support. You can contact the Trust directly on (09) 625 8176, email info@waterassistance.org.nz or visit www.waterassistance.org.nz. If your account is \$400 or less at the time of application you will not need to seek budgeting advice; however if it is greater than that amount you will be required to seek budgeting advice as part of the application process.

The trust will review your financial position and will ask you to agree a payment arrangement that is affordable and in return may approve a partial forgiveness of the amount owed to us. If you have used a budget advisor, the trust will expect the budget advisor to endorse the payment plan.

If you register with the Water Utility Consumer Assistance Trust you will be exempt from our debt collection process. If your account has been transferred to our collection agency already, we will put your account on hold.

- Some customers may be entitled to assistance from Work and Income (WINZ). You can phone WINZ at 0800 559 009 for more information. The Salvation Army may also be able to provide financial solutions in the form of low interest loans. For more information phone 0800 854 009.

5. If you do not pay your bill

If you do not pay your bill on time, your account will be placed into our debt management process until:

- You pay your overdue bill in full.
- You agree an acceptable payment arrangement with us.
- You register for hardship assistance with the Water Utility Consumer Assistance Trust (only residential customers may apply).

If your bill remains unpaid for reasons other than hardship, we will continue to pursue you for the unpaid debt.

Our debt management process is summarised below:

- We will initially send you a reminder notice to let you know your bill is overdue and needs to be paid urgently. We will also phone you if we have your phone number.
- If your bill remains unpaid, we will apply an administration fee which contributes to the costs of our collection process. This administration fee will be charged every month until your bill is settled.

- We will send you a further reminder notice saying that your water supply may be restricted. We will also call you regarding the impending restriction.
- If we do not believe that water restriction is appropriate for your property, you will receive a letter warning of possible debt collection action.
- We may send one of our experienced credit services staff to your property to discuss the reasons why your account remains overdue.
- We will leave a final warning card at your property advising that water restriction will be actioned in 48 hours' time.
- If we forward your account on to a debt collection agency, this will incur further costs which we will ultimately recover from you.
- If all of the above actions do not lead to payment, we may take legal action. Legal action will incur further costs which we will ultimately recover from you.
- While your bill remains unpaid, we will continue to contact you requesting payment.

6. Water restrictions

As noted in the outline of our debt management process, we may restrict your water supply until you pay your bill or agree to a payment plan.

With a restriction in place, your supply of water will reduce from 1 litre per second to 1 litre per minute which is enough to maintain sanitary conditions.

We do not restrict in situations that would cause unsafe conditions or extreme hardship. However, we will continue to pursue payment of your debt.

7. Contact us

- If you have any questions or issues with our debt management processes please contact us on (09) 442 2222 or email us at info@water.co.nz.

Would you like help reducing your water bills?

We provide a free water audit service to households in Auckland, the Waterwise Advice Line. This is delivered in partnership with EcoMatters Environment Trust. To get in touch with the Trust, please call (09) 442 2222, or email info@water.co.nz.

All you need to do is spend around 30 minutes on the phone with an expert and explain your exact situation. You will then receive a personally-tailored report on how your family can reduce its water use. Over the following 12 months, EcoMatters will track your water use and update you on your progress.

By reducing your water use, you will also reduce your water bills.