

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Fire Capacity Fee on Your Water Bill

Q: What will this fee pay for?

A: Although this fee has often been called a “hydrant fee” in the past, the public fire capacity fee pays for much more than just the installation and maintenance of fire hydrants. Adequate fire protection capacity requires installing pipes, pumps, water towers, which are larger than what is needed for everyday household use. Such pipes, pumps, etc. must be sized to provide the massive amounts of water needed to fight fires.

The Fire Capacity Fee on your water bill helps pay for oversizing of pipes to allow more water flow, installation of water towers for storing water, oversized pumps to allow for the pressure needed to combat fires and the maintenance of water infrastructure and fire hydrants. This fee will not pay for any of the costs of operating the fire territory – only costs related to the water flow, capacity, and pressure for fighting fires.

Without fire flow capacity, home insurance for Pendleton residents would be higher.

Q: Why must municipal utilities customers pay for public fire capacity?

A: Providing a reliable water supply for fire capacity is an important function of Pendleton’s water utility. In fact, the very first public water systems were developed to fight fires.

With the new formation of a multi-jurisdictional Fire Territory, the fee has been shifted to individual jurisdictions. In years’ past, the responsibility was paid through the fire department/territory to the water utility by property tax dollars.

Q: How much is the Fire Capacity Fee?

A: Each residential water customer of Pendleton Municipal Utilities is charged \$5 per month. This will appear as a separate line item on your water bill. Businesses that have larger water meters will pay more based on the size of the meter.

Q: How has this cost been covered in the past?

A: Previously the Pendleton Fire Department, and for a short time, the South Madison Fire Protection Territory paid the fee using money collected from property taxes.

Q: Will my taxes go down as a result of this?

A: The Fire Capacity Fee will no longer be a part of the Fire Territory Property Tax Levy.

Q: Is this a cost that should be paid by the Fire Territory and not water customers?

A: This charge has nothing to do with the costs of operating the South Madison Fire Protection Territory. The Fire Capacity Fee on the utility bill covers the costs that Town of Pendleton incurs to be able to maintain the fire flow capacity. Public fire flow capacity is completely independent of any of the expenses incurred by the SMFPT in fighting fires.

Q: Do any other cities make residents pay for fire capacity?

A: Most cities and towns bill residents for public fire capacities through their water bill.

Q: I don't have a fire hydrant in front of my house. Why do I have to pay?

A: Although you may not have a hydrant directly in front of your house, Pendleton's water system has been designed and built to provide you and your neighbors with fire flow capacity.

Q: I have a fire hydrant near my house but I am not connected to Town water. Will I have to pay?

A: No. If you do not have town water, you will not pay the fee.

Q: If I don't pay my bill, will you add late fees on the fire protection part of the bill?

A: Yes. Late fees are applied to any part of the water bill that is not paid by the due date.

Q: Once I start paying this fee, does it mean that I can use a fire hydrant for anything I want whenever I want to?

A: Only the South Madison Fire Protection Territory, Bulk Water Permit holders, and Pendleton Municipal Utility staff are authorized to use the hydrants at any time. Permit holders are required to use only designated hydrants and pay a fee.