

Utility Billing and Payment Options

By: Mike Barhorst

Basic utilities, such as water, sewer, and stormwater and trash collection are important services provided to you as a Sidney resident.

In 2008, as the City began to weather the Great Recession, the staff of the Utility Billing Department and Income Tax Department was pooled into a single department named Revenue Collection. Revenue Collections bills and collects the majority of the City's revenues including, income tax, utility bills, cemetery fees, swimming pool passes, lodging tax, code enforcement fees and other generalized billing.

Our utility customers are either billed quarterly or monthly, depending on customer preference or landlord requirements. The bill contains water consumption for the previous period and refuse service is billed for a period in advance (either 1 month or 3 months, depending upon the billing frequency).

Sewer charges are calculated based on water consumption, while the EPA fee and stormwater charge is a flat monthly amount for all residences. A late payment penalty of 5% is added if not paid by the due date on the bill.

In 2015, the City had a total of 9,109 utility accounts with the bulk of those accounts (8,191) being classified as residential. The remaining 918 were identified as commercial, industrial or governmental. Approximately 45% of all utility billing accounts are billed monthly with an average of 5,650 bills processed each month. This number has continued a steady upward trend as more customers opt for monthly billing.

Sidney customers have several utility bill payment options. Auto deduction from a checking or savings account is the most convenient and efficient method. The bill amount is deducted from your account on the invoice due date. If that date falls on a legal holiday or weekend, the payment will be deducted the next business day. Customers just need to complete a short authorization form and provide a voided check. Currently around 260 customers take advantage of the monthly auto pay program.

Of course, many banks now also offer free online banking and this too is a convenient method of payment. We ask that if using this form of payment, that your account number be listed in the memo or comments section of the check. Approximately 750 customers take advantage of online banking service to pay their Sidney utility bill.

The City also offers a self-serve online payment option via a secure link to our Merchant Processor on www.sidneyoh.com. Customers will need their account number and Customer ID to use the online service. A nice feature to this service is 24/7 access to your account which includes billing and payment history. There is no fee if paying by electronic check. A \$2.95 convenience fee is paid directly to the processor for those opting to pay by credit card. Approximately 600 utility customers use this payment method monthly.

Of course, customers may still mail or pay in person with cash, check or money order, as a majority of our customers presently do. Credit cards are also accepted in person for payment.

No matter which payment option you chose, you will still receive a bill to verify amounts or usage. Whether that bill is the traditional paper bill or electronic noticed emailed directly to your inbox, the choice is yours.

There are several advantages to the receiving your utility bill electronically. You have immediate, 24/7 secure access to your billing information with a 13 month history at your fingertips. It's also an environmentally friendly and cost efficient option for the City as it reduces the cost of postage and necessary supplies. A monthly paper invoice averages \$0.5335 per bill, with an electronic bill cost reduced to only \$0.115 per e-bill.

If you are interested in making the switch to e-bill, simply visit www.sidneyoh.com/Utility-Billing and click on the "Receive your Utility Bill by email" link. You will be redirected to our SmartBill site where you will be able to create an account. This service too continues to grow in popularity going from 78 customers in 2014 to 137 customers in 2015.

No matter which payment method or billing option you choose, our goal is to provide the best possible service at reasonable rates to each of our customers.

If you have any questions about any of the payment or billing options, please contact the Revenue Collection Department at 937.498.8114.