



Virginia Department of Public Utilities is once again asking for your help keeping steam manholes free of excess snow. When snow is thrown onto steam manholes, the snow melts, drips onto the pipes, and causes them to rust and eventually leak - increasing maintenance costs. The melting snow also cools the steam pipes, causing the steam in the pipes to condense. When this goes through your system, your steam billing goes up.

Also, remember to keep access areas to all outside meters shoveled. Meters can then be read and serviced when required. It is especially important to keep gas meters and regulators free of snow and ice to prevent malfunctioning.

Gas meter protection can be as simple as :

- Use a broom (not a shovel) to clear snow from your meter, regulator & vents.
- Remove icicles hanging above your meter.
- Sweep snow away from outside openings of natural gas appliances (such as a clothes dryer).
- Install a temporary cover in the winter.
- If your meter becomes encased in ice call us.

Call for more suggestions (218)748-2104

ADOPT A HYDRANT: If you have a fire hydrant near your home and are able, please keep the hydrant clear of snow.



Checking for Leaks

The average household's leaks can account for more than 10,000 gallons of water wasted every year and ten percent of homes have leaks that waste 90 gallons or more per day. Common types of leaks found in the home are worn toilet flappers, dripping faucets, and other leaking valves. These types of leaks are often easy to fix, requiring only a few tools and hardware that can pay for themselves in water savings. Fixing easily corrected household water leaks can save homeowners about 10 percent on their water bills.

To check for leaks in your home, you first need to determine whether you're wasting water and then identify the source of the leak. Here are some tips for finding leaks:

- Take a look at your water usage during a colder month, such as January or February. If a family of four exceeds 12,000 gallons per month, there are serious leaks.
- Check your water meter before and after a two-hour period when no water is being used. If the meter changes at all, you probably have a leak.
- Identify toilet leaks by placing a drop of food coloring in the toilet tank. If any color shows up in the bowl after 10 minutes, you have a leak. (Be sure to flush immediately after the experiment to avoid staining the tank.)
- Examine faucet gaskets and pipe fittings for any water on the outside of the pipe to check for surface leaks.

Find this article at www.epa.gov/watersense

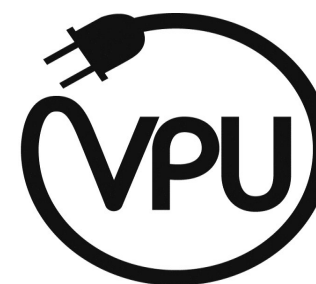
VPU Customers Pay

Water: \$2.50 per unit (1 unit of water = 750 gallons)
Sewer: \$8.42 per unit (1 unit of sewer billed for every unit of water used)

THE FACTS ON LEAKS

- 10 percent of homes have leaks that waste 90 gallons or more per day
- A leaky faucet dripping at the rate of one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons per year
- Did you know? Minor water leaks account for more than 1 trillion gallons of wasted water each year and is equal to annual household water use in the United States
- A shower leaking at 10 Drips per minute wastes more than 500 gallons per year
- 11 million homes need REPAIR leaks by checking faucet washers and gaskets for wear and replacing them if necessary
- Replace old toilets with WaterSense models & save 13,000 gallons of water savings for the average family
- Homeowners can save 10 percent on their water bills
- look for WaterSense. Meets EPA Criteria

EPA | epa.gov/watersense



Virginia Public Utilities

The VPU Quarterly is a customer newsletter published by the City of Virginia, Minnesota Department of Public Utilities.



VPU – QUICK NOTES

KNOW THE SMELL OF NATURAL GAS—BE SAFE!
If there is a faint smell of natural gas, call VPU at 218-748-7540.
If in doubt, leave the building immediately & call 9-1-1.

STREET LIGHT OUT?
If you notice a street light that is burnt out or flickering, please call VPU at 748-7540 so that we may get it fixed and keep our streets bright!

Before You Dig, Contact Gopher State One Call
Dial 1 8-1-1 or 800-252-1166 or www.gopherstateonecall.org

CHECK YOUR WALL PATCHES
If you have steam heat in your home, or an abandoned steam line to your home.....
Periodically check the wall patch where the steam enters your building for leaks.
If you have a vacant property please check property often, as damage can occur quickly...
Call 748-7540 with questions.

THE VPU QUARTERLY

JANUARY 2018

The VPU office will be closed on the following dates:

- January 1, 2018
- January 15, 2018
- February 19, 2018
- March 30, 2018

Utility Commission Moves Toward Steam Conversions

At its peak in the 60's and 70's, Virginia's steam system had over 3,000 customers and was considered the world's largest residential steam system. Two efforts to reduce the size of the residential district, and years of customers choosing alternatives to steam, has brought that number down to roughly 1,425 residential customers and 200 commercial. Steam sales are split roughly 50/50 between residential and commercial customers. The vast majority of the district ranges from 60 to nearly 100 years old – well beyond its functional useful life. Its sheer size, roughly 60 miles of pipe, has our distribution crews scrambling – as is evidenced by the number of barrel vents and stove pipes which remain in the system. These vents are risks to unsuspecting children, eyesores to visitors, and mudholes after a rain. A heavy rain event can create three months of additional repair work.

Because of this sprawling network of deteriorated pipe, VPU loses two units of steam for every one unit it sells. Shrinking the system down to a more densely packed core of higher volume users will allow us to get control of the steam losses. Operating losses have averaged \$800,000 over the last five years depending on how cold the winter is and how wet the summer is. The Commission has decided it is time to face the hard reality that we need to address the steam system.

There's no doubt this will be an inconvenience. Right now the Commission is making plans to "ease the pain". There couldn't be a better time to do this because natural gas provides a very attractive option. Yes, people can choose other alternatives, but natural gas prices are such that the savings resulting from converting to natural gas will go a long way toward paying for the conversion. An additional fact is that houses with steam heat sell for less than those heated with other fuels. So, simply doing the conversion will result in a notable increase in a house's resale value.

There are a lot of details to be hammered out in the coming months, but for now, please access our website at www.vpuc.com to view a steam conversion article we have put together that provides more detailed information about what's on the horizon.

VPU to Begin Charging for Card Usage

Beginning February 1, 2018 the Utility will begin assessing a 2.75% charge for all payments made using a credit or debit card. Thus customers using debit or credit cards over the counter or on our on-line payment platform will be charged a fee of 2.75% of the payment amount. Paying with cash or check over the counter, or paying online by check (which is essentially a direct draw from your checking or savings account) will remain free of charge and we encourage you to access those payment options.

The Utility began watching these costs more closely in 2012. At that time some measures were taken which kept a lid on costs. However, in 2016, usage of cards with reward points spiked up, doubling our annual payment processing costs to roughly \$50,000/year. Processing a credit/debit card transaction costs the Utility an average of roughly \$5.00. That's three times the \$1.60 cost of an over the counter cash payment and 100 times the \$.05 cost of a payment made using our Direct Pay program. The Utility has taken this action following the lead of City officials who implemented these charges effective December 1, 2017 on the bulk of their services.