

**City of Alpena
Water/Wastewater Utility**

CUSTOMER HANDBOOK



**Prepared by: Earth Tech - Alpena
January 2002**

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INTRODUCTION



The City of Alpena Water/Wastewater Utility provides water service and wastewater service to approximately 11,500 residents of the City of Alpena and about 4,000 Alpena Township residents. The City supplies these services in partnership with Earth Tech, the operation and maintenance firm hired by the City of Alpena to operate the City-owned Utility. This partnership has been in existence since 1988.

The information contained in this handbook is presented by the City of Alpena and Earth Tech to assist you with questions you might have concerning your water and wastewater utility service.

The information in each of the sections in this handbook is in the form of "Frequently Asked Questions" followed by a descriptive answer. The answers refer to City Ordinances or Council Resolutions where appropriate, and are intended to provide a plain language and/or simplified explanation. However, nothing in this handbook is intended in any way to replace the wording or intent of official City Ordinance language. In case of any misunderstanding or conflict with any such official regulation, the official regulation will govern.

Primary Contact:

Mike Glowinski, Earth Tech Utility Manager
Phone: (989) 354-4891
Fax: (989) 354-8472
Email: mglowinski@earthtech.com

Our Address

City of Alpena
Water/Wastewater Utility
Earth Tech
210 Harbor Drive
Alpena, MI 49707

Our Office Hours

7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Monday to Friday (except holidays)

Our Phone Number

(989) 354-5942
(989) 356-4595

EMERGENCIES AFTER HOURS

(989) 354-5942
(989) 354-9111

GENERAL INFORMATION

How do I start or cancel my water and wastewater service?

If you are moving into or out of our community, you must request your service account to be activated or deactivated by calling Earth Tech at 354-5942. Ask the customer service representative to either:



- *Start service* by putting the account in your name. Activation of the account requires a customer signature. The form can be obtained and signed at the Utility Administration Office, 210 Harbor Drive. If the customer has access to a fax machine, the form can be forwarded upon request.
- *Cancel service* by requesting a final billing. Deactivation of the account also requires a customer signature. We will read the meter and prepare a final bill for service to be sent to you at a forwarding address.

How do I know my water is safe to drink?

The City of Alpena is fortunate to have one of the world's largest sources of high-quality surface water for its raw water supply. Lake Huron water is drawn from Thunder Bay near the southern boundary of the City of Alpena. We provide treatment of this surface water by:



- Removing fine solids that are suspended in the raw water through chemical conditioning and gravity settling
- Filtering solids through seven (7) mixed media sand/granular activated carbon filters
- Adding fluoride for dental health
- Disinfecting the filtered water to prevent microbial contamination through a low level chlorine dosage.

Earth Tech and the City of Alpena are dedicated to providing water to the community that is safe to drink and meets all drinking water standards. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) requires all public utilities in Michigan to meet certain standards. The MDEQ monitors to be sure those standards are met by requiring that daily, monthly, and annual tests be performed on the water in our community. The results of these tests are routinely reported to the MDEQ.

A complete list of test results is available to any customer or other interested person by contacting Earth Tech's office and requesting a copy of the water quality testing results. An annual summary of the required data and permit compliance status is provided in our annual Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) that is mailed to all City customers.

Providing water that is pleasing to drink is also a priority of the utility. Consequently, the addition of granular activated carbon treatment was implemented in 1996 to remove naturally occurring compounds that can cause drinking water taste and odor. This additional treatment has been very effective, and in 1997 the City of Alpena received a regional award for "Best Tasting Water" from the Michigan Section of the American Water Works Association.

What if my property doesn't have water and sewer service currently?

Contact the Utility Administrative Office at (989) 354-5942 to apply for new service at a vacant lot. The customer must pay a Connection Fee and Permit Fee before being connected to the water system or sewer system.

What kinds of fees are involved?

Assuming water and/or sewer mains are in place and able to provide adequate service to your property, the following charges apply:

- 1) **Connection and installation fees.** The fees are based on the size of the water meter or sewer pipe diameter to be installed at the property. The following is a schedule of those fees:

<u>Tap/Meter Size (Inches)</u>	<u>Tap-In (Connection Fee)</u>
Water 1	\$2,510.00
Water 1-1/2	\$2,765.00
Water 2	\$3,385.00
Sewer 4 or 6	\$1,940.00

(Fees for larger size taps also are in effect; for additional information, please contact the Alpena Water/Wastewater Utility.)

- 2) **City plumbing permit/inspection fees.** The following fees must be paid in advance of any plumbing work being conducted on the water or sewer service lines from the property line to the outside of the residence. The following is a schedule of those fees:

Water only	\$ 80.00
Sewer only	\$ 80.00
Water and Sewer	\$105.00

Only property owners may conduct replacements of or repairs to the water and/or sewer service line from the premises to the connection point. However, in any other circumstance, the work must be done by a licensed plumber.

- 3) **State plumbing permit/inspection fees.** A state plumbing permit must be obtained in advance of any plumbing work being conducted on the water or sewer service lines from the property line and throughout the residence. Information on state plumbing permits may be obtained by contacting:

Bureau of Construction Codes
Traverse City District Office
701 S. Elmwood, Suite 7
Traverse City, MI 49684
(231) 922-5310

BILLING & CHARGES

Who is the customer?

The customer is usually the owner of a property, but City regulations allow for the account to be in the name of a tenant. The owner of the property may have the tenant, occupant, or lessee receive the statements and pay charges for water/sewer service acting as the agent of the owner.



However, generally the owner will not be relieved from the payment of any charges not paid by the tenant, occupant, or lessee. The property owner may be relieved of this responsibility by providing the utility with a copy of the signed lease agreement and notification that they do not want delinquent utility charges to become a lien on the property. Under these conditions, no utility service will be provided to the property until a \$100 security deposit is paid by the tenant. While the account is in the name of a tenant or lessee, the tenant or lessee will speak to all utility service questions relating to that account.

How often is my water meter read?

Meters are generally read quarterly, and you will receive a quarterly billing. In the event that the meter cannot be read, bills will be estimated based on past usage history. For the convenience of the customer, a remote register has been placed on the outside of most properties. This allows the meter to be read without gaining access to the actual meter inside the customer's business or dwelling. Bills are normally mailed the first week of the month.

How much will my water bill be?

Charges for service are based on meter readings (actual or estimated). These are explained in more detail below. A residential customer served by the City of Alpena and using between 1 and 6,000 gallons of water per quarter would have the following minimum water/sewer bill:

Minimum quarterly water	\$12.42
Minimum quarterly wastewater	\$14.70
Quarterly service charge	<u>\$ 3.51</u>
MINIMUM BILL TOTAL	\$30.63



The typical City customer uses 18,000 gallons of water per quarter and would have the following water/sewer bill:

Quarterly water charge	\$37.26
Quarterly wastewater charge	\$44.10
Quarterly service charge	<u>\$ 3.51</u>
TOTAL BILL	\$84.87 **

** For comparison purposes, this represents a monthly charge of \$28.29 for both water and sewer.

Where can I pay my bill?

We have several convenient methods that payments can be made. They are:

- 1) By mail. When mailing your payment, send a check or money order made payable to the City of Alpena to:

Alpena Water/Wastewater Utility
210 Harbor Drive
Alpena, MI 49707

Please be sure to put the account number on your check and include the right-side portion of your bill.

- 2) At the Utility Administrative Office. Normal hours are from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday -Friday, excluding holidays.

Alpena Water/Wastewater Utility, 210 Harbor Drive, Alpena, MI 49707

(When paying in person, please be sure to bring the entire bill.)

- 3) Night Depositories.

Payments can be made after hours in the night drop boxes located either in the public parking lot behind City Hall or at the Utility Administrative Office at 210 Harbor Drive. The payment should be by check or money order (no cash please) and placed in an envelope with the right side portion of your bill to ensure proper credit is received. Your canceled check is your receipt for payment. We cannot be responsible for cash payments left in the night drop.

- 4) Bill Payment Centers: Current bills **only** may be paid at the following financial institutions:

First of America Bank
HPC Credit Union
Alpena Alcona Area Credit Union
First Federal Savings & Loan Association
Besser Credit Union
Alpena County Medical Credit Union



When is my bill due?

For water/sewer charges, payment is due by the due date shown on each quarterly statement. The due date is generally 15 days from the date the statement is mailed to the billing address.

Can I make arrangements to pay my bill late?

If your service is about to be disconnected for non-payment of service, in order to avoid disconnection you must make payment in full by the disconnection date, or come in to the Utility Administrative Office to sign a payment agreement. Please call the office for further information on payment agreements.

How do I get the meter tested at my address?

Water meters are factory tested when new and will accurately register water consumption for many years. However, if a customer suspects that a meter is registering improperly, they can request a meter test. If the meter is found to be registering accurately, within standards set by the American Water Works Association, the meter read will be considered conclusive evidence of past consumption. Refunds or credits will be issued if the test shows the customer has been overcharged. The City can test a meter at any time and correct any meter that is registering incorrectly without the consent of the customer.

Should I get an irrigation meter?

Irrigation meters are generally installed at residential properties to meter outside use of water. These are considered separate services when used for lawn and garden watering.

A separate bill is issued for the irrigation meter and the customer is billed for a "water only" account on a quarterly basis. There is no charge for wastewater collection or treatment on these accounts.

The irrigation meter program was created by City Council Resolution No. 24. A complete outline of the program requirements can be obtained from the Utility Administrative Office at 210 Harbor Drive. Customers may be required to modify internal plumbing to accommodate irrigation meter installation.



How do City of Alpena rates compare to other area utilities?

The Alpena Water/Wastewater Utility operates as an Enterprise Fund. All operation, maintenance, and replacement costs are funded by the rates charged to our customers. Tax dollars do not subsidize these expenses, and all water and sewer revenue is used exclusively for utility operation, maintenance, and replacement.

The utility's mission is to provide high quality service at competitive rates. A rate survey conducted in 2000 demonstrates our success at achieving this goal. A total of 30 northern Michigan utilities were surveyed, and the average quarterly water and sewer bills ranged from \$50.08 to \$158.74. Out of the communities surveyed, Alpena had the second lowest average bill at \$54.94.

WATER USE and WATER LEAKS

How much water does an average customer use in a month?

Actual water use will depend on the number of people in your home as well as how you use water. It will also depend on whether you have any leaks in your home plumbing system - including pipes, water softeners, faucets and toilets. A typical family of four that uses little water for lawn sprinkling and has no plumbing system leaks may typically use between 18,000 to 22,500 gallons per quarter. This will result in a combined water/sewer utility bill of about \$84.87 to \$105.21 per quarter. If your use is significantly higher, and if you do not use a large amount of water for sprinkling, pool filling, etc. you may have a water leak.

Some typical leak rates from various water fixtures (faucet, toilet, hot water tank) are shown in the following table. For example, a toilet leak that allows a toilet to refill as little as once per hour over a period of 90 days could waste nearly 13,000 gallons of water and increase your water bill by about \$59.

Waste per 90 days at 60 psi water pressure	
Diameter of Stream	Gallons
1/4 Inch	1,181,500
3/16 Inch	666,000
1/8 Inch	296,000
1/16 Inch	74,000

How can I check for water leaks?

The easiest way to check for leaks is to visually examine plumbing fixtures for signs of running water or drips and/or to listen for sounds of running water when the fixture should be off. A toilet leak will slowly drain the tank and cause it to refill when no one is flushing the toilet. This is evidence of a leak. An easy check for a leaking toilet is to put a few drops of food coloring or some powdered drink mix into the tank at the back of the toilet. Do not flush the toilet. After about 15 minutes, check the toilet bowl. If the water in the bowl is colored, the toilet is leaking and should be repaired.

Another way to check for leaks is to read your meter *before* a period of no water use (such as at night or when leaving home) and reading it again *after* the period of no water use. The readings should be the same. If they are not, it is possible evidence of a leak.

If you need assistance in checking for plumbing leaks, call the Utility Administrative Office (at 354-5942) and ask the customer service representative for assistance. A service person can visit your home and help check for leaks, at no charge to you.

Please note -- Malfunctioning toilets, leaky faucets, appliances, and valves causing a loss of water are not eligible for bill adjustment because they are within the control of the customer.

A water pipe broke in my house. Will you adjust my bill?

Defects in internal plumbing are under the control of the property owner. The water that is lost due to a leak passes through the meter and by ordinance must be billed. Generally, the leaking water also discharges to a drain and enters the wastewater collection system. Bill adjustments for water and sewer charges cannot be made under these circumstances.

CUSTOMER COMMITMENTS

The City of Alpena and Earth Tech are committed to providing reliable and efficient water and wastewater utility services to our customers. In providing these services, we incur a number of responsibilities, many of which are described in this handbook. In order to provide these services to our customers, each and every customer also takes on several responsibilities and makes commitments so that all customers may enjoy safe and reliable water and wastewater services. These customer commitments include:

- customers are responsible for paying any and all charges incurred on the account by the due date that appears on the bill
- customers must provide access to City-owned meters for meter reading purposes

Further information on customer commitments is included in the questions below.

What is a water service line and who does it belong to ?

A water service line is typically a 3/4" or 1" diameter line that runs underground in your yard from the City water main, usually near or under the street, into the plumbing system in your house. The portion of the service line from the water main to the shut-off valve (located in the right-of-way or utility easement) is owned by the City. The portion of the line from the shut-off valve to the house is part of the plumbing system of the home, and is owned by the homeowner or property owner.

The City is responsible for maintaining and repairing the City's water main and the City's portion of the water service line. The customer or homeowner is responsible for maintaining the customer's portion of the service line.

What is a sanitary sewer lateral and who does it belong to ?

A sanitary sewer lateral typically a 4" or 6" diameter line that runs underground in your yard from the City sewer main, usually near or under the street, up to your house and into the sanitary piping system in your house. The sanitary sewer lateral from the home to the right-of-way is part of the plumbing system of the home, and is owned by the homeowner or property owner. The operation and maintenance of this part of the sewer lateral is always the responsibility of the property owner.

The City is responsible for maintaining and repairing the sewer main. Any required replacement of the sewer lateral within the City right-of-way or within a utility easement is the responsibility of the City. If the portion of the lateral between the property line and the main was replaced after January 1, 1988, the customer is responsible for its operation and maintenance from the home to the main. If the portion of the lateral from the property line to the main was installed before January 1, 1988, the City is responsible for its operation and maintenance.

What can be disposed of in sanitary sewers?

Sanitary sewers are designed to convey wastewater from homes and businesses to the wastewater treatment plant. Sanitary wastewater includes wastewater from sinks, showers, and toilets and does not include any storm water runoff from roof drains, sump pumps, or storm water drainage ditches. Such storm water discharges to the sanitary sewers are **illegal** and are potentially damaging to the ability of the sanitary sewers to properly convey sanitary wastewater.

Other debris such as sticks, grease, gravel, dirt, leaves, or other solid wastes should never be placed in sanitary sewers or dumped into manholes. This debris has great potential to block sewers immediately or over time, causing sewers to stop and wastewater to possibly backup into home laterals. Also, liquid wastes such as motor oil or vehicle fluids, fuels, or untreated industrial discharges should never be placed into sanitary sewers. These have potential to cause formation of gases or explosions or to impair the wastewater treatment process.

EMERGENCIES AND DISRUPTIONS IN SERVICE

What should I do if I need to turn off the water to my house?

Every home should be equipped with a shut-off valve that allows you to turn the water off inside your home. It is wise to locate that valve in case of an emergency. In most "Alpena" homes, the main valve is located at the master meter in the basement, crawlspace or utility room. (If you need assistance locating the valve, call Earth Tech and schedule an appointment with a service representative to help locate the valve. There is no charge for this service.) Turning the valve clockwise should completely

turn off the water inside your home. If there is no valve in this location of your home, please check with a plumber or a previous owner to find out the location of the shut-off valve in your home. If you need an emergency shutoff, call Earth Tech at 354-5942 or 354-9111, 24 hours per day.

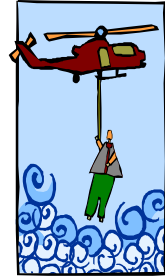
What should I do if the sewer is backing up into my house?

**CALL Earth Tech IMMEDIATELY AT 354-5942, 354-4891, or 354-9111.
After hours call 354-9111.**

What do I do if my drains won't drain?

Check to see if the drain problem you are having is isolated to one sink, bathtub or other single fixture. If so, the problem is in the drain line to that fixture and you are responsible for taking care of the problem.

If the problem seems to be throughout the home, call Earth Tech first. We will check the main lines to see if there is a back up in the sewer main system. If the problem is in the City's sanitary sewer main line or the lateral, Earth Tech will clear the stoppage as quickly as possible. There is no charge for this service if the obstruction is located between the sidewalk and the curb and the line has not been replaced after January 1, 1988. If the obstruction is located between the home and the right-of-way, the property owner is responsible for a \$46.00 service call charge if the service is provided during normal working hours. After-hours service call charges are \$82.00 per call. Charges for services provided by Earth Tech will appear as "Other Charges" or OC on your quarterly Water/Wastewater bill.



PLEASE NOTE: Neither the City of Alpena nor Earth Tech can be responsible for plumbing bills incurred because we were not notified first and asked to check out the problem.

How will I be notified that my water is to be shut off for repairs or maintenance?

Whenever possible, Earth Tech will plan for routine maintenance and notify each customer one (1) working day prior to disrupting service.

In the case of an emergency such as a water main break, the first priority is to minimize potential property damage and restore service. In an emergency, the utility will provide as much advance notice as possible via the local media.

If the water line has to be completely shut down with the loss of pressure, we will issue a "boil water notice" to all customers affected by the shut down. A notice will be hung on your door or handed to you, telling you to boil your water prior to use for cooking or drinking. You will be notified in the same way once a sample has been taken and laboratory analysis results show that the water is safe for domestic use. Generally, this entire process takes no more than 48 hours.

How will I find out about water use restrictions?

In the event of drought, disaster or any other emergency demanding an immediate response to protect the water supply and public interest, voluntary and/or mandatory water use restrictions and any other measures necessary may be ordered by the City Manager. We will make customers aware of these restrictions through use of the radio, television and newspaper media. Please help by complying with any necessary restrictions so that normal service can be restored as soon as possible.

The City has not implemented any such restrictions in recent history.

SERVICE REGULATIONS

Index to City Ordinances & Resolutions

Information contained in previous sections of this handbook is intended to provide a summary of rules and regulations governing water and wastewater services provided by the City of Alpena Division of Water and Wastewater and Earth Tech. Official regulations are contained in Alpena Water and Sewer Ordinances and in City Council Resolutions. An index to these ordinances and resolutions is included below.

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Topic</u>
98-56	Water Rate Generally
98-57	Tapping and installation service charges
98-60	Enforcement
98-61	Lien for delinquent charges
98-92	Use of public sewers required
98-94	Building sewers and connections
98-121	Charged for all connections; purpose
98-125	Charges as lien

What if I have a complaint about my water or wastewater service?

If you have a concern at any time regarding your utility service bill, disconnection notice, quality of service or any other matter relating to water or wastewater service, please contact Earth Tech. Your concern may be made in writing, in person or by telephone at 354-5942. Earth Tech will make every effort to satisfy your concerns about your water or wastewater service and the manner in which it is delivered to you. Earth Tech operates the City's water and wastewater utilities in accordance with City Water and Sewer Use Ordinances, and does not have authority to change these regulations. This authority is in the hands of City Council. When your concern or suggestion would require a change in City policy or City regulations, we will advise the City Manager of the dispute.

For customer inquiries or complaints regarding Earth Tech service, our procedure for responding to a complaint is as follows:

For written complaints:

Our Customer Service Representative (CSR) will:

- Read, identify, and research your concern - dispatching a service person if needed to obtain any on-site information needed to resolve the problem.
- Attempt first to respond to you by phone with the results; but, if unable, will respond to you in writing.

By phone or in person:

Our Customer Service Representative (CSR) will:

- Identify your concern and attempt to resolve the issue immediately.
- If the Customer Service Representative is unable to immediately resolve your complaint without further research, the CSR will:

- Research the concern and, if necessary, dispatch a service person to obtain any on-site information needed to resolve the problem.
- Attempt first to contact you by phone; but, if unable, will respond to you in writing.

If you do not feel an adequate response has been given or you are unsatisfied with the findings, the following recourse is available:

- You can review the complaint and the CSR's findings with the Utility Manager.
- If you still remain dissatisfied, you can complete a Request for Variance of Procedures form at the Utility Administrative Office.

For more information regarding City Water/Wastewater policies, the following staff may be contacted:

Mike Glowinski, Utility Manager
Phone: (989) 354-4891
Fax: (989) 354-8472
Email: mglowinski@earthtech.com

Alan L. Bakalarski, City Manager
Phone: (989) 354-4158
Fax: (989) 354-4585
Email: alb@alpena.mi.us

Rich Sullenger, City Engineer
Phone: (989) 356-9203
Fax: (989) 354-4585
Email: richs@alpena.mi.us

