



Policy Name: Accidental Water Leak Adjustment

Policy Number: FI-020-2022

Administrative Approval Date: 2022/07/15

Council Approval Date: 2022/08/08

Most Recent Amendment Date:

Effective Date: 2022/08/08

By-law reference:

Supersedes: N/A

1. Policy:

- 1.1 The District Municipality of Muskoka's Accidental Water Leak Adjustment policy provides account holders who utilize District water services financial assistance regarding the repair of accidental water leaks on private property.
- 1.2 Under this policy, customers can request adjustments to water and wastewater consumption charges after the accidental leak has been repaired by completing the Accidental Water Leak Adjustment Request Form.

2. Purpose:

To provide an opportunity for customers to request an adjustment to water and wastewater consumption charges, in certain circumstances, when an accidental leak has occurred in the customers home or property and the faulty equipment has been repaired in a reasonable timeframe.

3. Scope:

- 3.1 The District's Accidental Water Leak Adjustment policy (policy) provides limited financial relief to eligible customers to address abnormally high water and wastewater bills associated with accidental plumbing failures.
- 3.2 The policy allows for staff to address those instances when a metered water customer receives an abnormally high bill as a result of an accidental plumbing failure. Though the customer is responsible to repair leaks, it is recognized that a high water and wastewater bill resulting from an unintentional water leak can present financial hardship to a customer.
- 3.3 The policy provides the opportunity to educate the consumer about the impact of water leaks while ensuring the financial impact of the increased water consumption is partially mitigated.

4. Definitions:

- a) **Account:** A unique account created by the District that stores and records current and historical water and wastewater billing and contact information for each premise in the District.
- b) **Leak:** An accidental water loss caused by broken and/or malfunctioning plumbing fixtures and/or pipes within a residence or building. A leak occurs when there is a failure of the plumbing system to do what it was designed to do.
- c) **Unoccupied:** A dwelling and/or building in which occupants are absent from the property for a time period of 72 hours or more, due to such matters as vacations or prolonged illness.
- d) **Vacant:** Regardless of the presence of furnishings, a vacant dwelling and/or building means the occupants have moved out with no intent to return. A newly constructed dwelling and/or building is also considered to be vacant after it is completed and before the occupants move in. A dwelling and/or building is also vacant when the occupants move out and before any new occupant moves in.

5. Administration:

5.1 General Information

- 1. An adjustment may occur only after all leaks have been repaired and verified with an actual water meter read by District staff. Obtaining an actual meter reading may be necessary, within a minimum of two weeks, to verify whether leaks have been repaired and usage has returned to normal.
- 2. Reasonable efforts (including hiring a plumber) to locate the leak and initiate repairs must be taken by or on behalf of the customer within 60 calendar days after receiving the water bill indicating the leak or through initial notification of increased water usage provided to the customer by the District. Where possible, on a best effort basis, the District will attempt notification through a courtesy call to the customer to advise and discuss higher than normal water consumption, mailing of a "high water usage" letter, and/or issuance of a field activity work order to verify meter readings.
- 3. The customer must complete in full the Accidental Water Leak Adjustment Request Form and provide documentation of repairs made prior to being approved for an adjustment within 120 calendar days after the date of final repair(s). The form can be found online at www.muskoka.on.ca.
- 4. There is no extension of the due date or the time for paying water and wastewater bills because of a pending adjustment request. Customers are advised to pay the entire amount due within the normal payment period or enter into a payment arrangement with the District for the

excessive amount in order to remain in good standing on all current billings.

5. Reimbursements will only occur when an adjustment request is approved by the Manager of Finance.

5.2 Criteria and Calculation

Leak adjustments are discretionary and will only be granted as follows:

1. If an adjustment is granted, this is a one-time per 24 month period adjustment per owner per property for active accounts.
2. Adjustments will only be for a maximum adjustment period of 120 calendar days (60 calendar days prior and 60 calendar days after receiving the water bill indicating increased water usage). Water usage must exceed two times (200 percent) the average of the similar billing period from the previous year. If no history is available, meter readings will be obtained to project normal usage. If projection is not possible, actual consumption of similar customers will be used to determine normal usage for the adjustment calculation.
3. Adjustments will be based on 50 percent of the water consumption amount exceeding the average of the similar period from the previous year.
4. Adjustments will be capped at \$1,500 (maximum combined water and wastewater adjustment).
5. Approved adjustments will be credited to the water and wastewater account.
6. Exceptions to the above criteria may be made on a case by case basis where estimates have been used for an extended period of time and have resulted in significant financial impact to the customer. Exceptions of this nature will be limited to periods of time where estimates have been used for more than four (4) months for customers within the Towns of Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, and Huntsville and more than six (6) months for customers within the Townships of Georgian Bay, Muskoka Lakes and Lake of Bays. Such exceptions will be reviewed and submitted to the appropriate authority based on the following table:

Amount	Authorized Position
Up to \$5,000	Manager of Finance, Revenues
Up to \$20,000	Director of Finance

5.3 Exclusions

No adjustments will be granted due to any of the following:

1. Usage above the customer's average monthly consumption is due to seasonal usage including, but not limited to, the following: watering of sod, gardening, filling swimming pools or whirlpools and washing vehicles or other uses where the customer is aware (or ought to be aware) of water consumption.
2. Water loss is due to theft, vandalism or construction damage as the responsibility to resolve these issues lies with the customer.
3. The leak was caused by a third party from whom the customer is able to recover their costs.
4. The dwelling and/or building is/was unoccupied and/or vacant for 72 hours or more. Customers have the responsibility to ensure the dwelling's condition does not contribute to a failure of the plumbing system (e.g. ensure that heating has been maintained). For extended absences, customers should consider shutting off the water supply (except where water is used for heating) and draining all the pipes and appliances.

5.4 Appeals

- i. Within 30 days of being given notice of decision on the water leak adjustment, those who are not satisfied with the result may submit a request for appeal to the District.
- ii. Appeals must be submitted in writing indicating reason(s) why there is a disagreement with the adjustment amount. Appeals should be sent to:

District Municipality of Muskoka
Attention: Financial Services, Water Leak Appeal
70 Pine Street
Bracebridge, ON P1L 1N3

Written appeals may be submitted electronically to:

watersewerbilling@muskoka.on.ca

- iii. Appeals will be reviewed by the District's Director of Finance and/or Commissioner of Finance and Corporate Services, and/or Public Works department (or their delegate) as prescribed in this policy.
- iv. A written response indicating District's decision will be sent to the account holder.
- v. Subsequent appeals will not be considered, as the decision made under the appeal process will be final.

Related Policies/Procedures: AD:09 Water & Sewer Billing Users - Financial Arrangements; FI-014-2019 Corporate Collections (Accounts Receivable); District By-law 2021-42 Being a by-law to update municipal water and sanitary sewage services user rates.

Reference: (approval and amendment details, legal references):