

# STPUD working out water rates for metered customers

By Kathryn Reed

For the nearly 5,500 South Tahoe Public Utility District customers who have water meters, their rates for this quarter are not going to be what they are used to.

This is because of state mandates. California has required water districts with more than 3,000 connections have their jurisdictions all metered by 2025. STPUD has required all new construction since 1992 to be metered, but did not have a different billing structure.

Districts had to start reading the meters in 2010, with billing to begin no later than 2011.



Water meters are installed in South Lake Tahoe in 2010. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“The state requirement is anyone with a meter now has to be billed volumetrically,” Dennis Cocking, spokesman for STPUD, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The district’s board of directors had a workshop last week

about what the rate structure would look like. Board member Mary Lou Mosbacher was absent.

Shawn Koorn and Kevin Lorentzen of HDR Engineering Inc. out of Washington spent 90 minutes giving the board information. They will likely be back before the board in a month when adoption of the rate structure will be voted on.

"I usually go with a higher fixed, then a lower consumption as a transition," Koorn told the board.

With more than 80 percent of the costs involved with water being fixed, that leaves the rest based on consumption. As it is now, all STPUD customers have the same quarterly bill. It's the bills sent out April 1 that will be different for those with meters.

Each structure that is built from now on will be billed partially on consumption. The district has no grant money to put in more meters this coming building season. About 3,000 were installed last year.

It costs about \$1,300 to put in a meter in Lake Tahoe because not being able to move dir year-round, having to put them about 3-feet deep in a vault to deal with freezing, and the granite soil.

The state's theory when the legislation was passed is meters will help people conserve water. What the consultants have found with other districts is water usage drops initially because people want smaller bills, but over time they use what they want and pay the consequences.

One consideration the South Tahoe PUD board has to consider is being able to bring in the same revenue it has been in order to pay bills and be within budget.

The goal is for people to have relatively the same bill if they are average water consumers. It's the people who irrigate

heavily who will undoubtedly see higher water bills in the future.