



# PUBLIC FIRE PROTECTION CHARGES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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CITY OF MIDDLETON - WATER UTILITY  
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**1. What is the purpose of a Water Utility?**

A Water Utility has three basic functions: 1) Furnishing water for consumption; 2) Furnishing water for sanitation; and 3) Capability to deliver water for fighting fires.

**2. What is the Public Fire Protection Charge?**

This charge is required by State law and regulated by the State of Wisconsin's Public Service Commission. It recovers the cost of water for fighting fires and the extra capacity built into the system to rapidly deliver a large volume of water to fight a fire anywhere within the Water Utility's service area. These costs include a portion of wells, pumps, storage facilities, water mains, hydrants, and an estimated quantity of water used for this purpose.

**3. How has Public Fire Protection been paid for in the past?**

Prior to 2019, the City had previously used property tax dollars to subsidize the Water Utility at the rate of approximately \$580,000/year for the Public Fire Protection facilities in the City of Middleton.

**4. Why have City taxpayers been paying for a Water Utility expense?**

Prior to 2019, the City had been using the property tax levy to subsidize these costs for the utility customers to maintain a lower cost of water service for residents and businesses currently connected to the system.

**5. Why is this fee on my Utility Bill?**

Due to budget constraints, state-imposed property tax levy limits, and reductions in state aids, the City can no longer afford to subsidize the Water Utility through the use of general property taxes. Utility customers now pay for a service that was previously subsidized by only Middleton property taxpayers. All utility customers are treated equally and non-profits also pay for their share of the Public Fire Protection costs.

**6. Isn't this a cost that should be borne by the Fire Department and not the Utility customers?  
Isn't this why I pay taxes?**

This charge has nothing to do with the costs of operating the Middleton Fire District. The Public Fire Protection Charge covers the costs of the Middleton Water Utility to be able to deliver water for fighting fires and is completely independent of any expenses that the Middleton Fire District may incur in order to use the water to fight the fire.

**7. What costs does the Public Fire Protection Charge specifically cover?**

Although hydrants are an important part of the cost, there are other expenses, such as increased sizes of water mains, increased pump capacity, and increased storage capacity (water towers & reservoirs), that all must be in place to supply water to fight a fire. These things must be in place to make sure the Water Utility has enough capacity to provide water for fighting fires and still supply daily water needs at the same time. If the water system was not used to fight fires, the system would cost the utility

significantly less to operate and maintain due to smaller mains, pumps, and storage tanks.

**8. I have multiple meters; will I receive a charge for every meter?**

Any meter providing general service (being consumed, used in a manufacturing process, discharge to the sanitary sewer, etc.) receives the Public Fire Protection Charge. If you have a property that has an extra/special meter for irrigation purposes only and a meter for domestic water use, the extra meter **WILL NOT** receive the Public Fire Protection Charge unless it is a 1-inch or larger meter.

**9. Do other municipalities have a Public Fire Protection Charge?**

There are 582 water utilities in Wisconsin regulated by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC). According to the PSC, about half of Wisconsin water utilities recover at least some of the public fire protection costs from direct charges placed on water utility bills.

Due to state-imposed property tax levy limits, more cities and villages are shifting to directly billing utility customers for Public Fire Protection costs. Many Dane County municipalities already charge utility customers for the Public Fire Protection, including the cities of Fitchburg, Madison, Monona, Stoughton, and Sun Prairie and the villages of Cottage Grove, DeForest, Mount Horeb, Oregon, Cross Plains, and Waunakee.

**10. How is the amount of the Public Fire Protection charge determined?**

The Public Service Commission has approved using the equivalent meters method to calculate the amount of the Public Fire Protection charge. Under this method, the rate paid by each customer is based on the size of their water meter and service. Customers such as businesses and schools with larger water services will pay a proportionally larger charge for Public Fire Protection.

**11. Does the Public Fire Protection Charge apply to Tax Exempt Properties?**

Yes, all utility customers are responsible for paying the Public Fire Protection Charge, including churches, schools, and government entities. Each utility customer pays the same rate as any other customer with the same meter size.

**12. What will my charge be for Public Fire Protection?**

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin has determined that the following rates will apply.

**Quarterly Public Fire Protection charges by Water Meter Size**

Meter Size (in.)	Quarterly Rate	Meter Size	Quarterly Rate
5/8	\$14.55	4	\$363.00
3/4	\$14.55	6	\$726.00
1	\$36.30	8	\$1,164.00
1 1/2	\$72.75	10	\$1,746.00
2	\$117.00	12	\$2,331.00
3	\$219.00	*Residential meters are typically 5/8" or 3/4" with limited exceptions	