



City of Yakima

News Release

Subject: New Utility System Installation

Contact: Utility Services Manager James Dean – 576-6615

Communications & Public Affairs Director Randy Beehler – 901-1142

Release Date: Thursday, September 1st, 2016

Temporary Utility Services Counter Closure for New System Installation

The City of Yakima's Utility Services Division will soon be implementing a new management and billing system that will make it easier and more convenient for customers to request services, change services, cancel services, pay bills, and manage their accounts.

The Utility Services Division customer counter at Yakima City Hall will close temporarily at noon on Thursday, September 8th and will be closed all day on Friday, September 9th while the new system is installed.

During the temporary closure, cashiers will not be available to accept payments from customers at the utility services counter or help customers sign up for or discontinue utility services. Customers will still be able to make payments by putting an envelope with a check or money order in one of two drop boxes located at City Hall . one near the 2nd Street City Hall entrance and one in the City Hall lobby. Customers will also be able to sign up for or discontinue utility services by calling 575-6080 during the temporary closure.

The Utility Services Division customer counter will return to providing all normal services on Monday, September 12th.

"We are constantly looking for opportunities to improve the customer experience," said Utility Services Manager James Dean. "The new system will provide our customers with more options for interacting with the Utility Services office and will give them better access to their accounts. The new system will help to streamline the whole process and make it more customer friendly," said Dean.

The new system includes online features that allow customers to set up a recurring payment schedule, pay by phone or text, and view their account details to better manage usage. Paperless billing and an automated phone messaging system that will alert customers of a bill that's due are also part of the upgrade. Additionally, the new system will make requesting, changing, or canceling services simple.

"Customers do need to be aware that their utility account numbers will be changed as part of the implementation of the new system," said Dean. "Changing account numbers may cause some short-term confusion, particularly for those customers who pay utility bills online using their own bank payment systems. Those customers need to make sure they enter the new account number in their bank payment system," said Dean. "But we are confident the long-term benefits will outweigh any short-term issues that may arise during implementation of the new system."

Customers can call 575-6080 on or after Monday, September 12th to find out what their new account number is or wait until they receive their next utility bill, which will include their new account number.

Work on the new system started about a year ago. The \$1.7 million cost of developing the new system has been paid from the Utility Services Division reserve fund.