

Council looks at \$1,500 fee for water shut-off valves

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If you're thinking about blowing off that pesky water bill, the Green River City Council wants you to think again.

Effective immediately, delinquent consumers could be on the hook for the costs of moving the shutoff valve, or curb stop installation, from their own property to the city's right-of-way, in order to enable city workers to discontinue service.

That price tag would be \$1,500, payable up front or via a court-ordered lien on the affected property, plus the water bill itself.

The city is not allowed under law to enter onto private property in order to shut a water valve off.

According to Jeff Nieters, city finance director, about 30 such accounts come up delinquent each month. Twenty-five of those are generally paid after the usual round of door hangers and notices, a 115 day set of procedures that will continue to be followed under the new directive.

It is the remaining five accounts -- which typically settle, according to Nieters, on the day before the water is scheduled to be turned off -- over which he hopes to gain leverage.

And that's OK with Council member Pete Rust.

"These consumers are playing a game to avoid paying a bill everybody else is paying," according to Rust.

For those who truly find themselves in desperate financial straits, Nieters said the newly staffed Utility Committee should be available to take their circumstances into account prior to shutoff.

Nieters confirmed in a later conversation that the committee will be convened to consider all outstanding accounts, and to invite consumers to come before them to plead their cases.

Citizens who are simply living beyond their means, however, are forcing more responsible consumers to foot the bill, Rust said.

Councilman Jim Boan initially asked why home owners who had nothing to do with locating a shutoff valve on their property should be required to absorb the costs of relocating it.

Councilman Tom McCullough first wondered whether such a requirement was legal, then questioned how consumers who couldn't come up with \$100 to pay their bill in the first place could reasonably be expected to produce an additional \$1,500.

By the end of the discussion, however, the Council agreed on the the new directive.