

Operational Policy

Policy Title:	Granting of Allowance for Customers with Concealed Water Leaks
Policy Number:	6.1
Focus Area:	Governance and Process
Responsibility:	Finance and Procurement
Authorisation:	3 July 2015

OBJECTIVE

This policy is to establish guidelines for staff and the public regarding the responsibilities of water consumption and necessity of early detection of water leaks.

POLICY

1. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

- A Concealed Leak is water escaping from a water service that is hidden from view (usually below ground). The interpretation of the customer being unaware of a leaking service and the leak being concealed from view is to be taken that there is no visible evidence of soaking or dampness. Damp walls, lush grass or damp soil does not constitute being concealed from view.
- A water service relates to all water service pipes, including recycled water service pipes, fixtures and fittings on the customer's side of the meter (outlet side), or 1 metre inside the property boundary for unmetered properties (excluding separate fire services).

2. Background/Legislative Requirements

Section 607 of the Local Government Act 1993 deals with writing off of rates, charges and accrued interest. Section 131 of the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 details procedures for writing off rates and charges.

This Policy provides a means for Council to grant relief from water consumption charges resulting from a concealed or hidden leak.

3. Policy, Protocol or Procedural Statement

- (a) The allowance is a 'one-off' concession that applies to all customer types and will be property based. That is, if a customer moves to another property or

owns more than one property, the allowance will be given once on each property.

- (b) The customer is responsible for the maintenance and repair of their private water service.
- (c) Richmond Valley Council grants a 'one off' allowance for water lost through a concealed or hidden leak in the private water service of customers. The allowance will be granted provided that:
 - The customer was unaware of the leak and the leak was concealed from view,
 - The leak was not due to the neglect of obvious defects in the private water service,
 - The private water service is repaired to Council's satisfaction.
- (d) In order to be eligible for the allowance towards the cost of water that was wasted as a result of the leak a customer may engage the services of a licensed plumber to repair the concealed leak or a statutory declaration is supplied by the owner that the concealed leak has been repaired.
- (e) This policy applies to all customer types as a 'one off' allowance and for each property that the customer owns. The allowance will apply to the potable (drinking water) service and/or recycled water service to a maximum of 200kL for each water service. The allowance will be calculated using data from previous consumption periods deemed leak free with priority placed on the previous corresponding period.
- (f) Where a customer is unaware of a leaking water service, on either a potable or recycled water service, and the leak is not due to neglect, a 'one off' allowance shall be given for the quarter that the leak was concealed from view.
- (g) The allowance will be equivalent to 50% of the increase from the water usage bill of the previous corresponding period, to a maximum of 200kL. The allowance is to be given up until a reading taken after the leak was repaired.
- (h) In addition to the allowance granted the residential water consumption charge will remain at the lower dollar rate until the end of that financial year.
- (i) A sewer usage charge is levied on commercial/industrial properties that have a water meter and are liable for a percentage discharge factor of water that is discharged into the sewerage system. Where sewer usage is involved, 100% allowance will be given for the increase in that charge due to a concealed leak for the current billing quarter only. All other conditions of the policy are to be met before consideration of an allowance is granted.
- (j) A property served by a common meter, i.e. strata block will attract the one allowance of up to a maximum of 200kL.
- (k) The customer may claim an allowance for a concealed leak detected and repaired within an earlier period. The allowance will be granted provided the above conditions are met and a written statement has been provided by the

plumber who affected the repairs. For old claims a 'one off' allowance will be granted, subject to the conditions outlined, to a maximum of 200kL.

4. Procedures for Claims for Concealed Water Leak Allowances

- (a) Claims for concealed water leak allowance must be submitted in writing. The customer is required to advise:
- how they became aware of the leak,
 - the date they became aware of the leak, and
 - the details of the repair via a Plumber's Statement (as detailed below).
- (b) Before the allowance is granted, the leak must be repaired by either a licensed plumber or the owner and provide a written report from the plumber or a statutory declaration from the owner of the leak stating:
- the date the leak was detected,
 - where the leak was situated,
 - the rate of leakage,
 - the date the leak was repaired,
 - the meter reading at the time the leak was repaired (if available),
 - possible cause, and
 - copy of plumber's invoice.
- (c) A reply to the customer must be confirmed in writing to ensure the customer is aware of their responsibility to cover further costs associated with leaks to their property.
- (d) Ratepayers not considered eligible for a concealed or hidden leak allowance will be liable for all consumption of water that has passed through the meter.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed bi-annually.