

Arlington may switch to new water meters

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ARLINGTON -- The city is considering a plan to install automated water meters that could help you determine whether your home has a leak.

The devices could also help the city save money and calculate and meet water demand more efficiently, officials said.

Currently, readers must go to each meter, open the box and record water consumption.

With an automated system, a transmitter on each meter would send information on gallons used to a hand-held device as meter readers walk to a truck outfitted with a computer, officials said.

Some systems can even transmit data to a central receiver, eliminating the need for a reader to be near the meters, they said.

The devices can transmit readings as often as needed to help customers determine whether they have a leak.

For example, if a customer called the water department because of an unusually high bill, officials could monitor that customer's usage throughout the day.

If the meter showed water being used when no one was at home, a leak would probably be to blame, said Julie Hunt, director of water utilities.

The city has hired Cognyst Consulting for \$36,500 to study whether the devices would be worthwhile.

Arlington looked into installing the devices a few years ago but decided it would not be not cost-effective, said Travis Andrews, assistant director of water utilities.

Manual checks were cheaper because fuel and labor costs were lower then, he said.

"The technology has improved, and now we're looking at water conservation becoming more important," he said.

Andrews said he expects to get the study's results in late May. If Arlington switches to the devices, they would be phased in over a few years, Andrews said.

Several Texas cities already use automated meter-reading systems. They include Euless, Galveston, Houston, McKinney, North Richland Hills and Plano.

By the numbers

12 -- the number of water-meter readers in Arlington.

1.2 million -- the number of water-meter readings in Arlington each year.

105,000 -- the number of water meters in Arlington.

21,000 -- the number of water meters with automated meter-reading technology in Grand Prairie.

42,000 -- total number of water meters in Grand Prairie.

4 -- the number of water-meter readers in Grand Prairie.

Sources: Arlington and Grand Prairie

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