

Excerpted from 1/11/05 announcement on the EPA listserve:

On December 23, 2003, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a final memorandum in the Federal Register (68 FR 74233) that outlined its revised policy regarding regulatory requirements under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) for properties that submeter for water usage. Through the revised policy memorandum, as a way to promote full cost and conservation pricing to achieve water conservation, the EPA changed its long standing interpretation of SDWA section 1411 as it applies to submetered properties. Under the revised policy, a property owner who had not previously been (or would not be) subject to SDWA national primary drinking water regulations through SDWA section 1411, and who installs submeters to accurately track usage of water by tenants on his or her property, will not then be subject to SDWA regulations solely as a result of taking the action to submeter and bill. EPA took this action because the Agency believed that water submetering promotes water conservation. The data and information available to EPA in December of 2003 did not show that allocated billing systems, such as ratio utility billing systems (RUBS) and hot water hybrid (HWH) systems, would promote water conservation. Therefore, EPA did not include other billing systems in the final revised policy.

The findings of a new two-year study of water billing practices in the multi-family residential sector, released on August 30, 2004, show the water conservation benefits of submetering. The study was conducted by Aquacraft, Inc. of Boulder, Colorado, the National Research Center, and Potomac Resources. The study underwent extensive peer review and was sponsored by EPA, National Apartment Association, National Multi Housing Council, City of Austin, City of Phoenix, City of Portland, City of Tucson, Denver Water Department, East Bay Municipal Utility District, San Antonio Water System, San Diego County Water Authority, Seattle Public Utilities, and Southern Nevada Water Authority. A copy of the study can be accessed at EPA Docket ID No. OW-2004-0039. The study showed that ``Submetering was found to achieve statistically significant water savings of 15.3 percent (21.8 gal/day/unit) compared to traditional in-rent properties after correcting for factors * * *'' In addition, ``This study found no evidence that Ratio Utility Billing Systems (RUBS) reduced water use by a statistically significant amount compared with traditional in-rent arrangements, and the data showed that the difference between water use in RUBS and in-rent properties was not statistically different from zero''.

The findings and recommendations of the study will help EPA and the drinking water industry better understand current mechanisms available to facilitate water conservation in multi-family housing. EPA strongly supports water conservation efforts, and encourages all actions to promote conservation by renters, homeowners, apartment owners, and water systems.

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