

How to counter the water bills



As we get closer to October 1st, I've noticed that most people I know are finally beginning to talk about the upcoming water charges they will have to start paying and how much their bill might be from next January.

None of my neighbours have yet received their letter from Irish Water, inviting them to 'apply' for the pleasure of having to pay for their water and supply the company with everyone's PPS number and confirm the numbers of people living in the house. No doubt it is on its way.

We're not metered yet either, so, as one neighbour said acidly: "We haven't yet joined the rest of the frogs in Irish Water's pot, waiting for the heat to be gradually turned up."

But we will. Only households who are entirely off the mains system and have their own wells and septic tanks will escape Irish Water.

Those who use only one or the other service (mains water, or mains sewerage) will initially pay half the flat rate of €176 for the first adult and €102 for every other adult until metering plus a six month grace period.

Once their inflow of water is metered, they will pay half the new water rate of €4.88 per every 1000 litres consumed.

Every metered household will be getting a six month grace period before the initial €176/€102 adult flat charge ends - children under 18 will not be charged during the transition period.

But once you've been on the Irish Water metered supply for six months, all water consumption in your household, less 30,000 annual free usage will be charged at a rate of €4.88 per 1000 litres. Households with children under 18 will get 21,000 litres free, the amount children are estimated to use annually, though originally it was estimated at 38,000 litres. All these charges/free allocations will be reviewed in 2016.

If, like me, your household comprises of three adults, our unmetered bill will be €380, that is, €176 for the first adult and €102 for every other adult.

If post-metering, we end up using the estimated 140 litres of water per day, per adult that the government expects we will, our annual water bill, less the 30,000 free litres, will jump to just over €600 a year.

This set rate transition period, and the six months after the meter is installed, is supposed to give us time to see how much water we are consuming so that we can change bad habits and learn to conserve.

This means repairing leaks, turning off the taps when brushing our teeth; avoiding baths; taking shorter, non-power showers (or showering at the gym); using conservation friendly appliances; using waste water and water butts for watering the garden, washing the car and animals, etc.

As I've written here before, it might also be a good time to consider ways to use less mains water altogether and perhaps to capture and recycle the rain water that pours off our roofs.

There are companies in the market that offer to install systems to owners of public buildings (like schools and nursing homes, sports clubs, etc) as well as to private homes.

Tank and pump-based, the cost of rain harvesting will depend on the size of the system you need (tanks are either put underground or attached to the side of buildings) and whether you are only trying to substitute the water used in your toilet and washing machines, or for drinking, bathing and in the kitchen; a filtration system is then also installed.

The big question that needs to be answered is whether rain harvesting isn't just possible (the bigger the roof size the more water that will be captured) but also whether it will be cost effective.