



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Stormwater Management Service (SWMS) Charge (Residential)

### 1. What is stormwater runoff?

Stormwater runoff is water that flows over our yards, streets, buildings, parking lots, swimming pools and other surfaces when it rains.

### 2. What are the impacts of stormwater runoff?

Stormwater adversely impacts the *quality* of our surface waters, as it carries with it various pollutants, sediments, and other debris from the surfaces over which it runs off. Stormwater also creates *quantity* problems which results in flooding, stream bank erosion, combined sewer overflows (CSO), basement flooding, and sewer backups.

### 3. How is stormwater runoff managed?

Stormwater runoff either flows directly into the nearest water bodies such as our local streams, ponds, rivers, and oceans, or is captured and is conveyed through the City's sewer pipes to the City's wastewater treatment facilities. Examples of stormwater management services include maintaining stormwater pipes and inlets, combined sewer pipe rehabilitation to abate flooding conditions, stream restoration, CSO management to reduce combined sewer overflows, and reducing pollution loading to the City's streams and waterways.

### 4. What activities does my stormwater bill fund?

PWD uses revenue generated from stormwater billing to fund a variety of activities including maintaining the City's system of stormwater pipes and inlets and implementing stormwater management and stream restoration projects to reduce combined sewer overflows and reduce pollution loading to the City's streams and waterways.

### 5. What constitutes a residential property?

Residential Property: Any building containing one or more dwelling units occupied for residential purposes, but not including dormitories, nursing homes, hotels, or motels.

### 6. What is a Stormwater Management Service (SWMS) charge?

A SWMS charge is assessed to recover the costs the City incurs in providing stormwater management services to create a healthy living environment and to comply with State and Federal regulations. The City's annual stormwater management costs exceed \$100 Million.

**7. Is the SWMS charge a “Tax?”**

No, the SWMS charge is NOT a tax. The SWMS charge is a utility user fee similar to a water utility charge.

**8. What is the basis of my SWMS charge? Is my SWMS charge based on my water consumption?**

SWMS charge is NOT based on your monthly water consumption. SWMS Charge is based on two parameters: the average Gross Area square footage and the average Impervious Area square footage for all residential properties.

The average Gross Area for a residential property is 2,090 square feet. The average Impervious Area for a residential property is 1,060 square feet. Based on this average Gross Area and Impervious Area values, a uniform monthly charge has been defined for all residential properties. *Please see Appendix A for additional details with examples, on SWMS charge calculations*

**9. What is a Gross Area (GA)?**

Gross Area refers to all of the property area contained within the legally described boundaries of a property and does not include portions of sidewalk that are in the public Right-of-Way. In other words, GA refers to the total lot size of a property.

**10. What is Impervious Area (IA)?**

Impervious Area means the total square feet of any plane hard surface area, including buildings, any attached or detached structures, paved or hard-scaped areas, gravel, and compacted dirt, that either prevents or restricts the absorption of water into the soil and thereby causes water to runoff the surface.

**11. Is the parcel based SWMS charge a new user charge that is assessed to increase utility revenues?**

No, the SWMS charge is NOT a new user charge, and it does not increase utility revenues. The City’s sewer customers have always paid the SWMS charge as part of their monthly sewer charges. The SWMS charge was previously included in the ‘Service Charge’ portion of your bill. However, beginning July 1, 2010, the method of SWMS charge assessment is being changed from a meter size based charge to a parcel area based charge. Additionally, the SWMS charge assessment will be presented as a separate line item in your Water / Sewer Bill.

**12. Why is PWD changing the method of SWMS charge assessment?**

Historically, PWD assessed SWMS charges based on the size of the water meter(s) located in a property. However, such an approach creates inequity as (i) the size of the water meter

bears limited relationship to the volume of stormwater runoff from a property; and (ii) properties such as vacant lots or parking lots without any water meter did not contribute to stormwater cost recovery.

The parcel area based charge provides a more equitable mechanism for assessing the SWMS charge, which is based on the square footage of Gross Area and Impervious Area. Properties with larger lot size and larger impervious areas will generate more stormwater than properties with smaller lot size and smaller impervious areas. Therefore, the parcel area based SWMS charge approach establishes a reasonable relationship between the stormwater burden imposed by a property and the SWMS charge assessed from that property.

### **13. How is the SWMS charge billed for my property?**

If your property has water and/or sewer accounts, then the SWMS charge will be assessed as a separate line item in your water/sewer monthly bill. However, if your property does not have a water and/or sewer account, then you will receive a utility bill with just the SWMS charge.

### **14. How is the SWMS charge assessed if I have multiple water accounts on my property?**

The uniform monthly SWMS charge will be equally apportioned among all the water accounts that exist on your property. For example, if your property has two water/sewer accounts, then **each** water/sewer account will be assigned 50% of the total monthly SWMS charge.

### **15. If there are multiple water accounts on my property, can I request a specific apportioning of SWMS charges among the water accounts?**

Yes. If you do not want the default approach of equal apportioning of SWMS charge among the accounts located on your property, you can request a specific distribution of the SWMS charge among the accounts, by filing a “Revised Charge Allocation” application (FORM A-1). However, the sum of the SWMS charge apportioned to the various accounts on your property should equal the total SWMS charge determined for your parcel. Please refer to the *SWMS Charge Credits and Adjustment Appeals Manual* for details. The manual is located on the PWD website at [www.phila.gov/water/stormwater\\_billing.html](http://www.phila.gov/water/stormwater_billing.html).

### **16. When does the transition to parcel area based SWMS charge occur?**

The parcel area based SWMS charge is effective July 1, 2010.

### **17. Stormwater from my property drains directly to a stream or river. Will I still be assessed a parcel based charge?**

Yes. Maintenance of streams and rivers within the City limits is also the responsibility of PWD. Unmanaged stormwater from impervious surfaces causes stream bank and stream channel erosion and degrades water quality by introducing pollutants into streams. Since the

City obtains its drinking water from the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, upgrading stormwater systems is a key aspect of protecting the City's drinking water supply. Federal mandates also require PWD to improve stream quality to comply with the Clean Water Act. Addressing these issues requires a large financial investment to fund stream and watershed studies, stream restoration projects, and stormwater management projects. PWD has already implemented a number of these projects and will be accelerating these programs in future years.

**18. My property is tax exempt. Do I still have to pay the SWMS charge?**

Yes. The SWMS charge is a "User Fee" and not a tax. Therefore, all tax exempt properties that are within the City limits have to pay the SWMS charge.

**19. How will the water, sewer, and stormwater charges be accounted if I only pay a portion of my bill and not the entire bill amount?**

When you make a payment (whether a partial amount or a full amount), your payment will be posted to the appropriate service in the following order of hierarchy:

1. Penalties and Interest (if any)
2. SWMS charge
3. Sewer charge
4. Water charge

**20. What is my recourse if I am assessed the SWMS charge for a property I do not own?**

If you are a tenant who is responsible for water and sewer charges, then you are also responsible for SWMS charges. However, if you are not a tenant, and do not own the property, then you can submit a stormwater appeal using FORM A – "Stormwater Management Service Charge Adjustment Appeal Application" to get the issue resolved. Please refer to the *SWMS Charge Credits and Adjustment Appeals Manual* for details. The manual is located on the PWD website at [www.phila.gov/water/stormwater\\_billing.html](http://www.phila.gov/water/stormwater_billing.html).

**21. What are the conditions under which I can dispute the SWMS charge?**

As per PWD's stormwater billing appeals policies, property owners can submit a stormwater appeal using FORM A – "Adjustment Appeal Application" for any one of the following reasons:

- ◆ Incorrect Parcel
- ◆ Inaccurate Property Classification
- ◆ Residential Sideyard

Please refer to the *SWMS Charge Credits and Adjustment Appeals Manual* for details. The manual is located on the PWD website at [www.phila.gov/water/stormwater\\_billing.html](http://www.phila.gov/water/stormwater_billing.html).

**22. I am a residential property owner and I received a bill for my garage lot. Is this a mistake?**

This is not a mistake. If the garage that you own is on a separate deed/tax parcel that is not a part of your residential parcel, then you will receive a separate stormwater fee for the garage parcel. However, your garage may qualify for a sideyard exemption if it is adjacent to your residential parcel, and if your residential parcel and the adjacent garage or sideyard parcels are deeded under the same ownership.

If you believe your garage would qualify as a sideyard, you can submit a stormwater appeal using FORM A – “Adjustment Appeal Application”. Please refer to the *SWMS Charge Credits and Adjustment Appeals Manual* for details. The manual is located on the PWD website at [www.phila.gov/water/stormwater\\_billing.html](http://www.phila.gov/water/stormwater_billing.html).

**23. The information you have on my parcel is not correct. How can this be fixed?**

Please fill out an Appeals Form using FORM A – “Stormwater Management Service Charge Adjustment Appeal Application” to let us know how our information about their parcel is inaccurate. This is very easy to do and will only take a few minutes! Follow these steps below:

1. Got to PWD’s Stormwater website – the one noted in our letter - [http://www.phila.gov/water/stormwater\\_billing.html](http://www.phila.gov/water/stormwater_billing.html)
2. Click where it says, “Where Can I Find More Information”
3. Download FORM A – Stormwater Management Service Charge Adjustment Appeals Application
4. Fill this form out, attach supporting information as suggested, and mail the form in.
5. PWD will be back in touch to let you know if we need more information and whether or not we were able to make the updates requested.



# APPENDIX A

## Monthly SWMS Charge Calculation Methodology

### Residential

#### Background

The Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) is transitioning the monthly Stormwater Management Service (SWMS) charge from a meter size based charge to a parcel area based charge, for all the properties within the City limits. The transition to a parcel area based SWMS charge, which is based on a property’s Gross Area (GA) and Impervious Area (IA) square footage, is to begin on July 1, 2010. This paper describes the calculation methodology that can be used for calculating the monthly SWMS charge for the City’s residential properties.

#### Rate Structure

For all the *residential* properties, PWD has developed a uniform monthly SWMS charge that includes a fixed GA charge and a fixed IA charge.

PWD has established a GA rate and an IA rate per 500 square feet for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 and FY 2012 through the recently completed Rate Case process. Table 1 presents the GA and IA rates for the period FY 2011 through FY 2014. The GA and IA rates presented for FY 2013 and FY 2014 are subject to change.

**Table 1 – GA Rate and IA Rate for FY 2011 to FY 2014**

Description	FY 2011 July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011		FY 2012 July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012		FY 2013 <sup>a</sup> July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013		FY 2014 <sup>a</sup> July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014	
	GA	IA	GA	IA	GA	IA	GA	IA
<b>System Unit Rate (per 500 sf)</b>	<b>\$0.526</b>	<b>\$4.145</b>	<b>\$0.528</b>	<b>\$4.169</b>	<b>\$0.528</b>	<b>\$4.169</b>	<b>\$0.528</b>	<b>\$4.169</b>

**Note:**

a. The SWMS GA and IA rates defined for FY 2013 and beyond are subject to change.  
sf = square feet

## Monthly SWMS Charge Calculation

This section presents a few sample monthly SWMS charge calculations for residential properties.

### A. Monthly SWMS Charge Calculation for Residential Properties (FY 2011)

The monthly SWMS charge for a residential property is the **sum** of the Monthly GA charge and the Monthly IA charge. Use the following steps to calculate the monthly Residential SWMS charge:

**Monthly GA charge:** Use the following steps to calculate the uniform residential GA charge:

**Step 1:** Assume the following:

Average residential **GA** square footage = 2,090 Square Feet

Monthly GA Rate = \$0.526

**Step 2:** Compute **GA Units** as follows:

Divide 2,090 Square Feet by 500, and then round the result to two decimal places.

GA Units =  $2,090 \div 500 = 4.18$

**Step 3:** Compute **Monthly GA charge** as follows:

Multiply the GA Units (from Step 2) by the GA Rate (Step 1), and then round the result to two decimal places.

Monthly GA charge =  $4.18 \times \$0.526 = \$2.20$

**Monthly IA Charge:** Use the following steps to calculate the uniform residential IA charge:

**Step 4:** Assume the following:

Average residential **IA** square footage = 1,060 Square Feet

Monthly IA Rate = \$4.145

**Step 5:** Compute **IA Units** as follows:

Divide 1,060 Square Feet by 500, and then round the result to two decimal places.

IA Units =  $1,060 \div 500 = 2.12$

**Step 6:** Compute **Monthly IA charge** as follows:

Multiply the IA Units (from Step 6) by the IA Rate (Step 5), and then round the result to two decimal places.

Monthly IA charge =  $2.12 \times \$4.145 = \$8.79$

**Monthly SWMS charge:** Use the following steps to calculate the uniform monthly residential SWMS charge:

**Step 7:** Compute **Monthly SWMS charge** as follows:

Add the GA charge (from Step 3) and the IA charge (from Step 6).

$$\text{Monthly SWMS charge} = \$2.20 + \$8.79 = \$10.99$$

Table 2 presents the Residential Monthly SWMS Charge for FY 2011 through FY 2014.

**Table 2 – Uniform Monthly Residential Stormwater Charge**

Description	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013 <sup>a</sup>	FY 2014 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Residential SWMS Charge</b>	<b>\$10.99</b>	<b>\$11.06</b>	<b>\$11.06</b>	<b>\$11.06</b>

**Note:**

a. The Uniform Monthly Residential SWMS charges defined for FY 2013 and beyond are subject to change.