

Water meters inevitable for progressive city

The days of casually using our water supply are over

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Hints from capital city officials that mandatory water meters are just around the corner should come as no surprise to residents. They're inevitable. With the demand on our only source of water supply consistently well over 90 per cent, a policy that requires conservation is the only progressive solution.

Charlottetown residents owe it to themselves, and to future generations, to be more conscious of the water they use.

The city introduced water meters as a option a couple of years ago for new customers hooking up to the system, and has made them available to other customers interested in adopting them. But the city is growing, and with increased demand on the Winter River, the city's only source of drinking water, the urgency of conservation has prompted some city leaders to champion a meter system, which would require consumers to pay for what they use. Coun. Eddie Rice has been a vocal advocate, and Mayor Clifford Lee is equally adamant about the need to bring in meters sooner rather than later. As soon as the city's water and sewer committee has a bylaw ready, the mayor hopes to call a meeting of council.

While it's Lee's and Rice's intention to legislate the use of meters, it's not a done deal yet. Council has to vote in favour of mandatory water restrictions and give legislation three separate readings before a bylaw would be in effect. No doubt some residents prefer the status quo. But that's no longer a feasible option. A flat rate for everyone neither rewards conservation nor punishes waste, so from a stewardship perspective, it's ineffective. But neither is it fair. Why should a couple, for instance, pay the same rate as a family of four or more? Why should a family without a dishwasher pay the same rate as one that uses one?

Whether we like it or not, the days of casually using our water supply are over. Charlottetown may be actively working on developing another source of water, but a progressive community doesn't frantically search for other water sources without making an effort to conserve the supply it has.

Water meters may cost the city to install and no doubt their use will mean water bill increases for the biggest users. But they should also result in a decrease for those who do conserve and make an effort to use water more

prudently. This is the message the city needs to get across to residents, and this is what councillors must consider when they cast their votes on this important issue.