

Inframark Billing Cycle Adjustments & Council Considerations

A citizen recently inquired about changes to the billing period on their most recent bill, as well as whether the rate adjustment after 10/1 was accurately reflected. They also requested a credit and expressed concern about missing meter read dates after 11/1.

Timeline of Actions Taken

2/10/2025 – Cassie provided Mirna and the Houston Billing Department with a spreadsheet detailing billing cycles, meter read dates, and invoice processing time frames. She also raised a question about how the mid-cycle rate change was applied and asked whether a solution could be implemented to address any necessary adjustments.

2/13/2025 – Mirna reviewed the situation, identified factors contributing to the billing delay, and scheduled a virtual meeting for 2/20 to discuss potential solutions.

2/20/2025 – Cassie and Lisa met via Microsoft Teams with Mirna Bonilla-Odums and Cathy Falke, VP of Customer Relations. **Key discussion points and takeaways:**

1. Billing Cycle Timing & Adjustments

- The meter read date for the 9/17/24 – 11/1/24 billing cycle was adjusted due to a change in Inframark's meter reading and billing software. The timing of this implementation created an unexpected shift in the billing cycle.
- Hilshire's bi-monthly billing structure differs from most other clients, who are on a monthly cycle. This presented some unique challenges in coordinating the transition.
- Invoice processing time, which typically takes about seven days for other clients, has at times taken longer in Hilshire. The meeting focused on identifying ways to improve turnaround time.
- **Proposed Solutions:**
 - Adjust meter reading dates gradually over the next five cycles (remainder of 2025) to maintain an average 65-day billing cycle and restore a 7-10 day invoicing period.
 - Issue an additional invoice in April to realign the billing schedule, though this approach may cause confusion for residents.
 - Transition to **monthly billing**, which would provide greater consistency but would require an ordinance change, rate restructuring, and adjustments for citizens. This has previously been considered as a long-term option when smart meters are installed.

2. Mid-Cycle Rate Change Adjustments

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- Preliminary calculations show an estimated total of \$2,300 in overbilling for this cycle, equating to an average of \$6 per account. This figure represents the difference between the rates that should have been applied and the actual charges based on the timing of the rate change.
- A question was raised about whether it was possible to calculate and issue credits for the rate change that occurred 14 days into the billing cycle.
- No immediate solution was identified, but this remains an area for further discussion.

3. Next Steps & Council Considerations

To restore consistency, Cassie approved the gradual adjustment of meter read dates. However, additional guidance from the Council is needed regarding the broader approach to billing:

- **Option 1:** Maintain the current bi-monthly cycle while implementing the gradual adjustments. Notify citizens about the schedule changes.
- **Option 2:** Transition to **monthly billing**, requiring an ordinance update, rate restructuring, and a budget amendment to account for increased costs.
- **Option 3:** Explore funding opportunities for **smart meter installations**, which would allow for automated billing and potential contract adjustments.
- **Option 4:** Evaluate potential vendors for smart meter installation and billing management while reviewing the structure of existing service contracts.