By Jan Schultz
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Most city of Imperial utility customers knew it was coming.

Unless you were out of town with your air conditioner turned way down and let the grass dry out during the city's last billing cycle (June 20-July 20), you knew the July bill was going to go up considerably.

And it did.

The city collected $85,177 more from utility customers in 2012 than during the same billing cycle in 2011, said City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland.

A look at the kilowatt-hour (kwh) and water usage from both years tells the story.

In 2011 for the June-July cycle, electrical usage was 2,460,480 kwhs and customers paid $240,275.14.

This year, usage jumped to 3,233,789 kwhs, and customers will pay a total of $300,095.05.

That's already more than last summer's hottest month—August 2011, when 2,944,514 kwhs were used.

Water use that same period in 2011 was 22,843,000 gallons for which customers were charged $33,232. The 2012 usage from June 20-July 20 more than doubled to 48,059,000 gallons and customers were billed $58,590.

Even with this summer's continued heat and lack of rain, electrical usage still didn't hit the all-time high peak in Imperial, according to Supt. Pat Davison.

That came on a frigid Feb. 1, 2011, when Imperial registered an electrical usage of just over 8,000 kwh for one hour that day which saw a high of only three degrees and a low of -12.

But, it's the summer kwh peak that concerns Davison more than what happens in the winter months.

That's because the highest peak the city hits from June 15 to the end of September is what's used to determine Imperial's rates in the coming year.

"The summer peak is what we care about," Davison said.

One of the ways to control the usage is the city's load management program.

The 17 center pivot irrigations systems that use city electricity are on the program automatically, Davison said.

During that June 15 to Sept. 30 period if the weather warrants it, center pivot systems will be shut off during the day if the load reaches a certain level, Davison said. When the load drops enough that evening, the pivots are turned back on.

The load management program is all computer operated, he said.

Homeowners and businesses also participate in a voluntary control of air conditioners, Davison added.

Davison said with the continued high temperatures here, the city has been controlling residential and business air conditioners "quite a bit this summer."

Again, when the load hits a certain peak during the day, air conditioners on the voluntary program are shut off seven and a half minutes every half hour.

These controls all are done to manage the city's peak usage between the critical June 15 and Sept. 30 dates, Davison said.

"By controlling that load, we keep the peak down and it saves thousands of dollars" in power costs to the city and customers, he said.

So far, the highest usage for electricity on the Imperial system was recorded July 24 when the peak one-hour period was at 7,700 kwh.

Concerning water, Davison said Imperial is nowhere close to exceeding its NRD allocation.

Like irrigators, cities are also given an allocation, but it is a gallon total versus acre inches.

Imperial's annual allocation is 423,254,750 gallons, which is determined using the city's population and all acres within the city limits, Davison said.

Not too many irate calls

There have been some, but City Clerk/Administrator Leyland said the city office has had few calls from upset people after the bills went out last week.

"I think everyone realized the bills were going to be high because it's been so hot for so long," she said.

Each month, city office staff runs a "high-low report" that identifies customers with a noticeable change in utility usage.

For those highlighted, public works employees go back and reread the meter, Leyland said, to make sure it wasn't a clerical error.

"We had tons of those this month," Leyland said.

Employees did not go back and reread meters because most all customers' usage was up.

"I don't remember anything like that in the past," Leyland said.

"We've had a double-whammy this year," she said. "No rain and hot temperatures," with no relief on usage, either.

Home and business owners interested in the voluntary control program can contact the city office, 882-4368.