

Austin Water's Dropcountr - Home Water Use Report Pilot Project

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is it?

Austin Water has contracted with Dropcountr, Inc., to provide, on a pilot basis, 10,000 residential customers with free home water use reports. 8,500 customers will be provided with reports accessible by mobile application and/or online. Three separate groups totaling 1,500 customers will be provided monthly written reports and were chosen based on water usage, geographic area, and at random across the city.

What is in the report?

The customized home water use reports are designed to help customers identify potential water savings and ideas on how to save water and money on their water bills.

Features include:

- A customer water use survey to be used with local property and demographic information to develop a home water use profile;
- Customer's individual historic water use and benchmarked comparisons to similar households in Austin, efficiency standards, and customer developed water use goals;
- Analytics and algorithms that use water use profile information to develop recommended tips on how to save water including links to related Austin Water conservation incentive programs; and
- Utility alerts and other important messages as well as announcements about new rebates and other incentive programs.

How were the participants selected?

To recruit participation in this pilot study, Dropcountr sent an e-mail in April to over 121,000 Austin Water customers with customer-provided e-mail addresses on file in Austin Water's billing system. Participants were then drawn at random from those who responded wishing to participate in the program. Those selected were then sent a notification on May 1 with instructions on downloading the application or accessing their report online. This randomization process is intended to help provide a statistically valid analysis of behavior changes prompted by use of the application. Available slots remaining after the initial solicitations will be available beginning May 18 for general download and use. Three control groups of 500 each based on high water use, geographic area, and at random from across the city will be sent monthly written reports beginning in June.

Where can participants find Dropcountr?

The Dropcountr mobile app may be downloaded from the [Apple](#) or [Android](#) App Stores.

If you would prefer to access Dropcountr via the web, you can sign up or log in using the Dropcountr website. To create an account, you'll first need to click [Sign Up](#). To log into your account later, you can click [Log In](#). Make sure you use an updated version of Internet Explorer (version 10 or 11), Firefox or Google Chrome to ensure good performance.

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For questions or problems about signing up for Dropcountr, contact: support@dropcountr.com.

Why was a mobile application chosen?

The mobile app platform was chosen to give Austin Water the ability to quickly provide customers with information and alerts as well as its ease in customer accessibility. In addition, Austin Water recognizes that more and more people are using electronic media for their information needs.

Does this mean that my current meter will be replaced by a “smart” meter that can provide me with daily, hourly or more frequent water usage?

Austin Water does not currently have “smart” meters that automatically report daily, hourly or more frequent water usage to the utility or the customer. Although more frequent water usage data may enable customers to more quickly detect leaks, monthly and seasonal use patterns can still be useful in assessing indoor and outdoor water use efficiency by comparing water use for similar months of the year or looking at recent water use trends.

How are the water use goals determined?

Dropcountr calculates a goal by using the household characteristics affecting water use the customer provides under Profile along with lot size information from the Travis County Tax Appraisal District and applies indoor and outdoor water efficiency metrics based on local and national studies. If the proposed goal is lower than the monthly water use, the customer should consider the Water Saving Tips and rebate programs to Save Water. If the goal is higher than the monthly water use, this may mean the household may already be efficient. However, the customer may still want to look at additional water savings to keep water rates and bills low. The chart below provides Austin Water’s tiered rate structure.

Single-Family Residential Volume Unit Charge Effective 11/01/2014

Water Rate Tier	Monthly Water Usage	\$/1,000 Gallons
Tier I	0 - 2,000 Gallons	\$ 2.93
Tier II	2,001 - 6,000 Gallons	\$4.49
Tier III	6,001 - 11,000 Gallons	\$7.29
Tier IV	11,001 - 20,000 Gallons	\$11.03
Tier V	20,001 - over Gallons	\$13.93

http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Approved_Service_Rates_2014-15_Final_Retail.pdf

A recent analysis by the Pacific Institute showed that an average person living in a home equipped with widely-available water-efficient appliances and fixtures uses about 32 gallons per capita per day (gpcd) indoors. In addition, many households could reduce their outdoor water use by 70% or more by landscaping with low water-use plants. In drought stricken Australia, households use an average of 54 gpcd for both indoor and outdoor uses, and residents of the Australian state of Victoria use only 40 gpcd. The average residential water use in Austin during

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2014 was 70 gpcd, for both indoor and outdoor water use. To calculate your indoor water use, use the Water Use Calculator at <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/water/watercon/calculator.cfm>.

How is my water use being compared to “similar households”.

Similar households mean those with similar property size and occupancy characteristics as your household, based on information from other Dropcountr participants, the Travis County Appraisal District, and the U.S. Census Bureau. These may not necessarily be households next door or in your immediate neighborhood. You have the ability to compare your water use to similar households up to a 5 mile radius.

What are the expected water savings from using the report?

Communities in California using similar home water use reporting software achieved on average about a 5% reduction in water use. The idea behind providing customers with home water use reports is to leverage social norms – comparing the customer’s water use with that of similar homes – as well as feedback to the customer on water and cost saving ideas and available rebates, and goal setting by the customer to see whether this customer engagement will be more effective in changing water use behavior.

What other communities are currently using Dropcountr?

A number of communities in California are already using Dropcountr, including the cities of Folsom, Lake Arrowhead, and Los Altos Hills.

Where can I find more information about the program?

Those customers who have questions about the program may call (512) 974-2199 or e-mail: WaterCon@austintexas.gov.

More information about Dropcountr can be found by clicking on this link: <https://dropcountr.com/>