



## **NEWS RELEASE**

Town of Culpeper  
400 S. Main Street  
Culpeper, VA 22701

Public Information Office  
540-937-0037

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Ron Mabry, Culpeper Town Treasurer  
Phone: 540-829-8220

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### **Town Eliminates Door Hangers for Delinquent Utility Bills**

The town will save the ratepayers money by eliminating the need to send a town employee to place disconnection warning door hangers at each location of delinquent utility customers.

Beginning this week with the mailing of the new utility – water, sewer and electric – bill, the town will no longer place the delinquent notices on a customer's door. The long white disconnect notice used for many years was left as a one-day warning that utilities would be cut off the next day.

“It's costly,” said Town Treasurer Ron Mabry.

Recently, the town began attaching a yellow notice with the white one announcing that it was discontinuing the door hanger practice. The yellow notice, primarily for repeat delinquent customers, explained the new procedures.

The town estimated that it cost about \$4.09 to print, create, process and have an employee post the hangers for each delinquent customer. For a three-month period in 2009, an estimated 390 customers each month were delinquent enough to face loss of services. During that time, the town spent about \$1,600 per month processing disconnect notices or more than \$19,000 annually.

Delivering the hangers was just one of a three-part delinquent bill process. Two of those steps remain. A customer still will receive information that the account is overdue on their current bill, with a payment due date provided. The town also, as it has in the past,

will mail a 10-day Utility Disconnect Notice with the amount owed before service is disconnected. Those two notices will serve as the only notices to overdue customers.

When the employee cuts off the service, a bright green door hanger will be left telling the customer service has been cut off due to non-payment, and who to contact to make immediate payment so that service may be restored. Mabry said that if the disconnected property is a rental, a notice also will be sent to the landlord six days before the utilities are shut off.

“We are doing that to help the landlord protect the property,” said Mabry.

If water or electric service is disconnected, the town requires that someone be home at the time the service is restored to prevent damage from left on appliances or open faucets. In the future, the town is working on installing an automatic meter reading system that will allow it to electronically and remotely read water and electric meters. With that system in place, the town also could disconnect water and electric services remotely, eliminating the need to send an employee to a location to physically conduct the shut off.

The treasurer noted that it is cheaper to pay the bill than to pay late and reconnection fees. An additional \$25 fee will be applied for reconnection of water or electric service once the bill is paid. The town also collects late fees for bills overdue by 11 days. The fees are higher if two utilities are involved.

“We are trying to save tax dollars and streamline our operations,” said Mabry.

Anyone with questions regarding the new procedure may contact the treasurer’s office at 540-829-8220.

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