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Oldham water bills to rise 20 percent

By Andrea Uhde
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The head of the Oldham County water district said customers can expect to pay \$6.85 more a month, on average, for their services starting next year.

Superintendent Phillip Ward said the district board has approved a 28 percent rate increase that makes the average monthly bill \$31.04 for residences, up from \$24.19. He said the Public Service Commission must still approve the change next month, but he doesn't expect any problems.

The change will help the district pay for a \$15 million facility improvement project that includes new water wells, a larger water treatment plan and a larger water main in the U.S. 42 area.

Ward said the district has around \$2 million from a federal grant for the projects, and it plans to use the rate increase to pay for the remaining \$13 million. He said the board has not decided when the rate increase will start, but it likely will be in January.

The district's 8,000 customers are billed monthly. The district also supplies water to La Grange and the Kentucky State Reformatory, Ward said.

During a recent Fiscal Court meeting, Judge-Executive Duane Murner said Fiscal Court does not get to vote on the 28 percent increase, which he said "is a lot to swallow." He said he is inviting the district to speak to Fiscal Court at its Tuesday meeting.

Ward said he realizes the increase comes at a bad time in the economy, but the district may be able to get deals on supplies right now. He said they started opening bids on the project Oct. 8.

"We're going to get a lot better bids," he said.

The district has been planning the improvements for years to be better prepared for the future, Ward said. Water demands on peak days of the year exceed what the district is capable of pumping, according to a fact sheet about the increase. In the past, the district has declared water-shortage emergencies and banned outdoor and recreational water use.

The district's most recent rate increases were in 1981, 1985 and 2004.

The new rates include a base charge of \$8.84 a month, plus \$3.70 more a month for every 1,000 gallons of water (up to 39,000 gallons).

The old rate started at \$7.69 and added \$2.75 for every 1,000 gallons of water (up to 39,000 gallons).

The bill for the average customer will be less than that in the Henry County Water District, which

charges an average of \$38.50 a month for 6,000 gallons of water.

But it will be more than in the North and West Shelby Water Districts, according to information from Oldham County.

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