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# Sub-Metering—Easy & Affordable for Every Size Property

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**W**e regularly hear the comment —“I’d sure like to install a sub-metering system, but my property has only a few units. It’s just too expensive.” They are quite surprised when they find out that the actual equipment and installation costs are very affordable, even for small sized properties. Recent technological improvements in sub-metering equipment and the emergence of low cost cellular based remote reading systems have brought easy and affordable new solutions to the industry.

Water rates in the City of Seattle have increased over 10% from 2010 to 2012 and are slated to rise 8.7% per year on average over the next 3 year rate cycle. Sewer rates are based on water usage and have been rising over 5% per year. The sewer charge for a typical local property is more than double the cost of water. In short, water and sewer rates are dramatically increasing and making it more difficult than ever for property owners to cover this cost within the monthly rent.

Accurately allocating utility usage is a common problem for many owners and managers. The State of Washington allows you to meter your tenants individually and then charge them for the actual amount they’ve used. This process is called sub-metering. You still pay your normal utility bills as you always have been, but now you get to recover that cost by billing your tenants for their usage as measured on the new individual meters. Installing a new sub-metering system will offer a return on investment (ROI) that is typically

less than one year.

Water and sewer charges are based on water consumption and can be sub-metered by installing a water meter for each unit. In the best case scenario, your building’s plumbing system will allow a water meter to be installed on the individual unit’s single water supply line. In many older buildings, however, the water lines in each unit do not have a single point of access. In this case, a water meter can be installed at each unit’s hot water tank.

This method measures the percentage of hot water used by each resident and, based on this calculation, the total water and sewer utility can be allocated to each resident accordingly.

Utility grade water meters that have the latest advancements in accuracy, low lead certification, installation flexibility, and digital pulse signal output are available for less than \$100 each. Meters can be installed virtually anywhere - hiding in a wall or ceiling, located either inside the resident’s unit or outside the building. Meters are typically supplied with mating meter couplings allowing the plumber to install them on piping of any material type.

Older outdated metering systems required that each meter had to be manually read each month. Sophisticated wireless automated meter reading systems have been used by larger properties for many years. But most of these systems have a high initial equipment cost and require a dedicated telephone line or internet connection for remote access.

Recently released new products now bring the advantages and simplicity of a wireless

meter reading system at a price that is affordable for any size building – even down to a duplex. Wireless transmitters are connected to the water meters that send the meter data to the NoWire™ display device located at the property. The NoWire™ display (price- \$795) can then be paired with other compatible products that offer access to the meter data remotely via telephone line, internet connection and now even cellular systems using inexpensive monthly text messaging service plans.

With these new remote meter reading systems, property owners or managers can sign up to receive a monthly email with the meter readings that they can use to bill their tenants for their portion of the utility cost. Or management can have a third party billing company calculate and prepare utility bills that are sent directly to tenants for a small service charge added to each bill that is paid for by the tenant.

*Kelly Koontz is Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Submeter Solutions, Inc. Submeter Solutions is based in Issaquah, WA and has been an Associate Member of RHAWA since 2007. Since 1999, Submeter Solutions has been selling, servicing and installing electric, gas and water utility meters and sub-metering systems locally and nationally. They also provide Third Party Billing services for multi-tenant properties. Information about Submeter Solutions is available at [www.submetersolutions.com](http://www.submetersolutions.com) or 888-64- METER. ♦*