

Toledo getting tough on unpaid water bills

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TOLEDO — The city is implementing a no-nonsense approach toward residents who don't pay their water bills or who siphon water illegally.

Consumers with outstanding bills are increasingly being threatened with shutoff from the city's Department of Public Utilities, and for the first time the city filed criminal charges against some residents for stealing water.

Among residents feeling the brunt of the new approach is City Councilman Tyrone Riley, who owns 23 properties, some of which he rents out.

Earlier this year, the councilman faced the threat of water shutoff for at least one of those homes after he racked up unpaid bills totaling \$8,680 on 14 houses. The amount he owes

has dropped to \$3,900 after Riley enrolled in payment plans.

"We have been threatening to shut off more than we have in the past and that has gotten people coming in to either get on a payment plan or pay their bill," Public Utilities Director David Welch said. "We do work out a payment plan and work with people."

Welch said his department goes after residents when they owe smaller amounts before their bills spiral into the thousands of dollars. He said most people pay their water bills.

Still, the city has \$2.3 million in bills between 60 and 180 days old. Another \$7.1 million is owed from bills that are up to 30 days old, but those are not considered delinquent.

City officials said people are also more aggressively stealing the water, which is sometimes discovered after service is shut off to a house but then it starts flowing soon thereafter.