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Water Dept. to put new meters at homes

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The Cleveland Water Department, which last month began installing automatic meter-reading equipment on commercial properties throughout the 70 Northeast Ohio communities it serves, will roll out the new technology in some residential areas today.

Customers in parts of Rocky River, Twinsburg and Reminderville will be among the first to receive the upgrades. The system promises to dramatically improve customer service by automatically reporting

hourly water use — virtually ending the department's practice of estimating bills when faulty meters go undetected for an entire billing cycle, said Jason Wood, chief of public affairs for the city's Public Utilities Department.

The system uses low-frequency radio transmitters, called "endpoints," which will be installed outside each house to harvest usage information, including peak-use times. The data are transmitted to one of 36 "collectors" affixed to telephone poles or other high perches throughout the area. About 150 devices called "repeaters" help bounce signals to col-

lectors from more-remote locations.

The upgrade will enhance customer service by allowing the department to more closely monitor water use and diagnose problems, such as leaky faucets and running toilets, before they lead to higher-than-normal bills that incense customers, Wood said.

Technicians installing the endpoints must gain access to about 420,000 properties in the department's coverage area between now and December 2013, Wood said.

Customers will receive mailings instructing them to call the department and schedule an appointment

when their neighborhood is on deck for service. Installations are slated for Bay Village and part of North Olmsted in the coming months, Wood said.

Technicians must use two forms of photo identification — their company ID and a Clear Reads badge — when introducing themselves to customers, Wood said. They also will drive trucks marked with the Clear Reads logo.

Customers can call the Water Department at 216-664-3130 to question the legitimacy of an installer trying to gain access to a residence, he said.