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Birmingham raises water, sewer fees

BIRMINGHAM (AP) — The Birmingham Water Works will start charging a \$1,000 impact fee to connect most new houses to the water system beginning today, and water and sewer bills will also rise for thousands of homeowners in the Birmingham area.

Larger new commercial and industrial buildings and very large new houses will pay higher impact fees, with the rate depending on the size of water meter needed, Water Works General Manager Mac Underwood said.

The new impact fees will affect the price of home building and other new construction for Birmingham Water Works customers in Jefferson, Shelby, Blount, Walker and St. Clair counties. Underwood said the fees were created to offset the cost of expanding the system to meet higher demand.

Also beginning today, Jefferson County will increase sewer rates by 8.2 percent, and Birmingham Water Works rates will go up by an effective 4.2 percent for the typical residential customer.

That means a typical household using both utilities, and consuming about 7,500 gallons of water a month, will see its combined bill for water and sewer service rise to \$88.15 in January, up 6.8 percent overall.

“It hurts the poor and the elderly,” said John Harris, president of Concerned Citizens for Social Change. “Our bills keep going up and we don’t have the funds to keep paying these higher utilities.”

Sewer rates in Jefferson County have increased 297 percent since

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1996, when the county began a program to fix sewers as required by a federal court consent decree and to meet federal clean-water requirements. The county has since sold and refinanced more than \$3 billion in bonds, which are repaid by sewer rates.

County officials said ratepayers can expect steady increases until 2011, when rates are expected to level off.

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