

# Tinley Park plans 2 audits of troubled water meter program

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Tinley Park, one of Chicago's largest suburbs uses a type of water meter that it knows has regularly overcharged residents — sometimes by hundreds of dollars a bill — while failing to give the public accurate information about the scope of the problem, a Tribune analysis found. June 3, 2015. (Chicago Tribune)

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## **[Tribune investigation into Tinley Park's overbilling water meters prompts two planned audits](#)**

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Tinley Park officials are planning two separate audits of their troubled smart water meter program in response to a Tribune investigation exposing chronic overbilling and the village's inaccurate statements to residents about the scope of the problem.

In the meantime, some residents told the Tribune they're waiting for relief and are not sure whether they can trust the village.

The Tribune investigation, published June 4, found that the middle-class suburb for years has known that the brand of smart meters it uses were prone to overbilling residents, yet it gave them an online article and newsletter mailing that suggested the meters were fine.



## **[Tinley Park vows to review overbilling water meters after Tribune probe](#)**

On Tuesday night, village officials said during a committee meeting that they will issue two separate requests for proposals from outside consultants who will review the water meter program and history, in general, and perform an audit of the village's billing and refunding procedures.

The Tribune investigation highlighted questionable efforts by the village to find bad meters and ensure that residents got the full refunds they deserved. In one case, the village cut a couple's water bills by \$109 after discovering the faulty meter, but a Tribune analysis found that the couple may have overpaid \$317 more.

Jake Vandenberg, a newly elected Tinley Park trustee, said he doesn't want the village to "deflect" or "come up with excuses."

"Let's get a consultant. Let's figure a good approach to this. Let's restore some trust, and let's move forward," Vandenberg said.

Village officials previously defended the water meters and said problems were rare.

Now Tinley Park leaders face significant challenges in determining how to address the water meter issues and how to reimburse people who may have been unfairly charged, like Bill Switalski.

Switalski, of Des Plaines, said he became responsible for his parents' Tinley Park home in February 2012 after his father died. Although the house was vacant, Switalski said he received a bill for 20,000 gallons of water use.



### **Tinley Park's failed approach to dealing with overcharging meters**

At first he suspected that someone may have been stealing water from outside the home. But in February 2014, his parents' account was again billed for 19,000 gallons despite the home being empty, leading the village to replace his meter and give him a full refund on that bill — but not the other, he said.

Reading the Tribune story was revelatory for Switalski, he said, because he didn't realize that the issue was widespread.

"I went around in circles with the Tinley Park Village Hall about unusually high water usage bills after my dad passed away," Switalski said.

The problem with the meters is called "spinning" — a nod to how numbers on over-billing meters spin more than they should to record water going through.

Village records show that at least 355 meters were diagnosed with the problem since 2007. But one former village employee told the Tribune that far more meters were caught spinning, and the true number could be obscured by village logs that



Trusting neither the meter nor the village's testing, and with village officials saying it will take "a couple weeks" to prepare the request for proposals from consultants and still longer for the review, Laura Konieczny said she feels she has "no recourse" and worries about what her next bill — based in part on her old meter — will show.

"I'm wondering how we're going to be able to afford it," she said.

*Chicago Tribune's Joe Mahr contribute*

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**Please sign this petition on behalf of Worcester residents:**

The Worcester National Grid Smart Meter Pilot program exposes the community to unprecedented risks in violation of local democracy.

Will you sign this petition to Attorney General Martha Coakley? Click here:

[http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/investigate-worcester?source=c.em.mt&r\\_by=8061333](http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/investigate-worcester?source=c.em.mt&r_by=8061333)

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