

Controversy Over Huge Water Bills

Linda So, WMAR ABCNews.com, October 24, 2008

Imagine getting a water bill saying you owe a couple thousand dollars. It's a scary thought, but it's happening to dozens of Baltimore city residents. Controversy over the outstanding water bills is leading to threats of eviction for some.

Washing dishes used to be a simple everyday chore for Kim Moore. But these days, it comes with a huge price. "My bill now is almost \$3000." Her water bill is \$2,698 to be exact. In August, she got the bill stamped with a possible eviction notice. Moore says, "I was flabbergasted when I went to the mailbox and saw the bill."

Moore lives at the Townes at the Terraces, a public housing development in West Baltimore. She says for years, she didn't receive a water bill and assumed management was paying for it. So when she got the huge bill this summer, she went straight to the management office. "They said initially they were paying it and they apparently were not. So then the tenants got all the bad balance."

Her neighbor Swanzetta Gardner has a similar story. Her water bill is almost \$3,000. She too took it to management. Gardner says, "She told me don't worry about the water bill. Don't worry about anything. So naturally I didn't worry about anything and then two years later I receive this outrageous water bill that at the time was \$2,000."

In an effort to resolve some of these huge water bills Councilman Bill Cole called for a meeting Friday at City Hall. Cole says, "It's incredibly unfair to evict people for not paying water bills when they didn't know they were supposed to be getting water bills particularly when you can't prove they received one."

But Edgewood Management claims they hand deliver all the bills to the residents. In a written statement, George Caruso, vice president of Edgewood, told us "We will continue to meet with any resident... And ensure that any amounts we are trying to collect are appropriate and owned by the resident."

Councilman Cole says tremendous progress was made at Friday's meeting. Edgewood Management has agreed to meet individually with the tenants who received an outstanding water bill and review each bill to determine the tenant's actual consumption.