THE PRICE OF WATER: 2015
Combined water, sewer and stormwater prices for households in 30 major U.S. cities.

Seattle and Atlanta have the highest total monthly bills. Each is building costly underground storage facilities and treatment plants to comply with federal requirements to reduce raw sewage that is dumped into lakes and rivers.

Santa Fe has the highest water prices in the survey. The small city of 70,000 recently completed a US$167 million pipeline from the Rio Grande.

San Francisco has the highest sewer prices. The city is investing in a $2 billion wastewater treatment plant.

Baltimore has stormwater fees that are mandated by state law as part of a program to keep polluted runoff from entering the Chesapeake Bay.

Water prices pay for treating, pumping, and delivering water, while sewer prices cover the cost of cleansing the water that goes down the drain.

Sewer prices are often higher than water prices because more energy and chemicals are required for treatment. Following the Clean Water Act, the federal government gave grants for new treatment plants during the 1970s and 1980s. Over the past three decades, however, new spending has been cut for local sewer infrastructure.

Stormwater fees are not included in every city’s monthly bill. Some cities use general tax revenues to pay for projects to reduce polluted runoff from streets and parking lots. However, these projects must then compete for funds with other departments like police and schools.

Rates current as of April 1, 2015.
Monthly bill calculated for a family of four using 100 gallons per person per day.
Source: Circle of Blue research, based on utility water rates.