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## Water utility company looks to boost rates

Average monthly bill would rise \$7.10

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New Jersey American Water Co. has applied to state regulators for new rates that would increase the average customer's water bill by 13.6 percent, company officials said today.

The change would boost the average monthly bill by \$7.10 to \$56.63. As part of the rate filing with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, the company also proposed implementing "innovative residential water conservation programs, expanding assistance to low income customers and creating new rate structures that would encourage conservation and generate economic activity in New Jersey."

According to the company, a wholly owned subsidiary of American Water, New Jersey American has franchises in 30 Monmouth County municipalities and seven in Ocean County.

New Jersey American Water, headquartered in Voorhees, is the largest investor-owned water utility in the state, providing water and wastewater services to approximately 2.5 million people. John Bigelow, the utility's president, said in a statement that rate increases are necessary "as we continue to make prudent investments in our water systems to maintain and improve service."

"Water remains one of the lowest utility bills for a household and our customers will continue to pay less than a penny a gallon for water," Bigelow said.

An aspect of the proposal would tie conservation to a tiered-rate structure. A pilot program for residential customers in portions of Monmouth County would implement a three-tier increasing block water rate structure on a seasonal basis from May through September, officials said, with the less water customers use, the less they would pay.

Rates will remain unchanged until this request undergoes public review led by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, company officials said. Approval, if granted, could take a period of nine months.

The Monmouth County franchises held by New Jersey American Water are in Aberdeen (in part), Allenhurst, Asbury Park, Bradley Beach, Colts Neck (in part), Deal, Eatontown, Fair Haven, Freehold Township (in part), Highlands, Holmdel (in part), Howell (in part), Interlaken, Little Silver, Loch Arbor, Long Branch, Middletown, Monmouth Beach, Neptune City, Neptune, Ocean Township, Oceanport, Red Bank (in part), Rumson, Sea Bright, Shrewsbury, Shrewsbury Township, Tinton Falls, Union Beach and West Long Branch.

The Ocean franchises are in Bay Head, Brick (in part), Dover Township (in part), Lakewood, Lavallette (in part), Mantoloking and Plumsted.