

# Understanding Meter Downloads and Meter Tests in Billing Disputes With the City of Johannesburg

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## INTRODUCTION

There are various reasons why a billing dispute may arise between a consumer and the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (“**the City**”). One of the ways to investigate and resolve certain billing disputes is through a meter download or a meter test, both of which are discussed in this article.

## METER DOWNLOADS AND METER TESTS

In simple terms, a meter download is the process of retrieving the information stored on your utility meter. Depending on the type of meter, this information may include your consumption history, meter readings, and other technical data that can help determine whether your municipal account has been billed correctly. This is done to resolve a billing dispute that you may have with the City. You can apply for both electricity meter downloads and water meter downloads.

As the City allows consumers to take their own meter readings, you may notice that the readings do not appear to reflect your actual water or electricity usage. If you suspect that your meter is not working properly, you can apply to the City to have it tested. Meter testing is conducted to determine whether your meter is correctly recording your water or electricity consumption. For example, the test can determine whether the meter is recording consumption too quickly or too slowly, which may result in you being incorrectly billed.

## WHY ARE THESE IMPORTANT

As indicated above, meter downloads are important when there is a dispute between a consumer and the City. They help identify the cause of any incorrect billing that may have occurred within a certain timeframe. This is important because there is a possibility that you may have overpaid for services supplied by the City during that period. The City is required to bill consumers correctly for the services they use.

Meter testing is essential because the way your meter records your water or electricity consumption affects whether you are billed correctly. If your meter is faulty, it may result in you being overbilled or underbilled. A meter test can help determine whether the meter is functioning correctly.

It is important to remember that obtaining a meter download or having your meter tested does not automatically mean that the City will correct your municipal account. These processes are simply used to determine whether the billing is accurate. If the results show that there is an error, the City may then need to correct your account by rebilling it. In some cases, however, further engagement with the City or the formal dispute resolution process may still be necessary before the matter is resolved.

## THE DUTY ON THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

There is a duty for the City to test your meter or to provide you with meter downloads if you are disputing any billing that may be resolved by either of these two methods. According to *Regona Properties (Pty) Ltd v City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality*<sup>1</sup>, if a consumer raises a dispute concerning the services provided by the City, it is the City that bears the responsibility of proving the accuracy of their meters, not the consumer. This means that if you have a dispute about the accuracy of the meter readings in your property, the City has the duty to prove that the meter readings are correct. A meter test or meter download may form part of the City’s investigation into whether the meter is accurately recording consumption. The City has to provide these to ascertain whether the registration of the meter is correct or not.

The court further stated that the City is bound by its Electricity bylaws, as they require that there should be meter testing if a consumer has any reason to believe that the meter is not registering correctly<sup>2</sup>.

## HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR A METER TEST OR METER DOWNLOAD?

Both meter downloads and meter testing are conducted once you have made payment for your application. This payment must firstly reflect on the City's system before anything further can be proceeded with. The City will generally only process the application once payment has reflected on its system. If it has reflected, they then proceed with your application. For your application to be conducted, there are forms that you need to complete and certain documentation is required by the City.

It is important to note here that the City requires you to go to the correct region where your property falls under to obtain these. If you go to the wrong region, they will most likely not assist you. Applications submitted to the incorrect regional office may be delayed or rejected. Further, in your payment, you must use your meter number as a reference number.

In practice, the process is not always completed as quickly as consumers may expect. Delays can occur for various reasons, including administrative backlogs, payment allocation issues, or delays in scheduling inspections or tests. Consumers should therefore keep copies of all correspondence and proof of payment, and follow up regularly on the progress of their applications.

### CONCLUSION

Meter downloads and meter tests are valuable tools for investigating municipal billing disputes. They can assist in determining whether a meter is accurately recording consumption and whether municipal accounts have been correctly billed.

Where a dispute is complex, involves substantial amounts, or cannot be resolved through the City's ordinary processes, obtaining legal advice may assist in protecting your rights and ensuring that the appropriate dispute-resolution procedures are followed.

<sup>1</sup> 2023 JDR 2918 (GJ) para 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* para 40.



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