

## KEEPING YOUR VEHICLES CLEAN

# Is the Cost of Water on Your Mind?



BY JACK JACKSON

Over the past 20 years we have addressed many questions, the most important being the cost of different cleaning methods.

Most customers are on the municipal water grid. Therefore, they are paying for water that is drinking quality water and using it to wash vehicles. A cubic meter of water equals 265 US gallons and a cubic foot equals 7.5 US gallons.

Municipalities issue a fixed monthly charge and then a monthly usage fee based on consumption, and of course sewage charges. Most sewer charges consist of consumption charges, with some actually imposing an additional cost for sewer discharge.

So how do you figure your cost of water to wash? It depends on your method of washing.

Hand Washing with a Pressure Washer uses 4-5 gallons of water per minute. If staff takes 15 minutes to wash a vehicle they are using 60 to 75 gallons of water. Costs on average are \$0.01 per gallon so it would be \$0.60 – \$0.75 to wash that vehicle.

Hand washing with a Regular Hose uses 17 gallons of water per minute. A 15 minute wash works out to 255 gallons or \$2.55

per wash.

Automatic Washes water use varies from as low as 5 gallons per minute to 300 gallons per minute. A 15 minute wash would cost \$0.75 to \$45 (although automatic washes do not take this long). This range depends on the equipment used and the recycling systems available.

The best scenario is an automatic machine with brushes that use much less water (and chemicals) since the brushes do the cleaning. Depending on your machine, you can pay as low as \$0.10 per wash.

The worst case scenario is an automatic wash that is touchless with no water recycling. A 300 gallon-a-minute machine that takes 5 minutes for the complete cycle (without chemical costs) will use 1,500 gallons of water,

costing \$15.00.

Take a scenario where 60 trucks are washed daily using an automatic wash. By reducing the time of washing to 2 minutes at \$0.01/gallon, their cost of water to wash per day is \$6.00. Compare that to using other devices: by hand with a pressure washer – \$24.00 per day, by hand hose – \$153.00 per day and by automatic touchless machine – \$900.00 per day. Where do you fit?

Water costs vary across North America due to the degree of municipal debt, not the degree of water consumption. Based on the first ever water report by a city in North America, completed by circleofblue.org, the costs (for household use per month) ranged from \$0.01 per gallon to as high as \$0.04

per gallon. Now multiply the dollar amount above by 4 and the cost is very substantial.

Water consumption has continued to decrease across North America; however, it's a catch 22 scenario. Less water use means less revenue for the municipalities. The issue is replacement of aging infrastructures to ensure the capacity of water can continue to be supplied, coupled with increasing costs of wages, chemicals and maintenance.

This is frustrating to most businesses as they continue to seek ways to reduce water usage, yet their monthly costs continue to increase. It is estimated by USA Today (Sept. 27th, 2012 article "Rising Water Rates"); the cost of infrastructure debt

has risen from \$1,012 in 2006 to \$1,611 per customer in 2011. The expectation is for increases in water charges from 5% to 15% every year, ongoing across North America to service the expected \$1 trillion dollars required to service the aging infrastructure over the next 20 years.

With the cost of water continuing to increase it will become a big part of everyone's business expenses. How do you determine your costs and what are your best methods to wash?

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