

BEFORE THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In re: Annual reestablishment of price increase or decrease index of major categories of operating costs incurred by water and wastewater utilities pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S.

DOCKET NO. 20230005-WS
ORDER NO. PSC-2023-0383-PAA-WS
ISSUED: December 21, 2023

The following Commissioners participated in the disposition of this matter:

ANDREW GILES FAY, Chairman
ART GRAHAM
GARY F. CLARK
MIKE LA ROSA
GABRIELLA PASSIDOMO

NOTICE OF PROPOSED AGENCY ACTION
ORDER ESTABLISHING 2024 PRICE INDEX FOR
WATER AND WASTEWATER UTILITIES

BY THE COMMISSION:

NOTICE is hereby given by the Florida Public Service Commission that the action discussed herein is preliminary in nature and will become final unless a person whose interests are substantially affected files a petition for a formal proceeding, pursuant to Rule 25-22.029, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.).

Background

Since March 31, 1981, pursuant to the guidelines established by Section 367.081(4)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.), and Rule 25-30.420, F.A.C., we have established a price increase or decrease index for major categories of operating costs on or before March 31 of each year. This process allows water and wastewater utilities to adjust rates based on current specific expenses without applying for a rate case.

We calculated the 2024 price index by comparing the Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator Index for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2023. This same procedure has been used each year since 1995 to calculate the price index. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, released its most recent third quarter figures on October 26, 2023.

Since March 31, 1981, we have received and processed approximately 4,025 index and pass-through applications. We have jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to Section 367.081, F.S.

Decision

I. Price Level Adjustment Index

In 1993, the Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator Index (GDPDEF) was established as the appropriate measure for determining the water and wastewater price index. At the same time, the convention of using a four quarter fiscal year comparison was also established and this practice has been used every year since then.¹ The GDPDEF is prepared by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Prior to that time, the Gross National Product Implicit Price Deflator Index (GNPDEF) was used as the indexing factor for water and wastewater utilities. The Department of Commerce switched its emphasis from the GNPDEF to the GDPDEF as the primary measure of U.S. production.

Pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S., we, by order, shall establish a price increase or decrease index for major categories of operating costs incurred by utilities subject to our jurisdiction reflecting the percentage of increase or decrease in such costs from the most recent 12-month historical data available. Since 1995, the price index adjustment has been determined by comparing the change in the average GDPDEF for the year ending September 30, instead of the original December 31, in order to more easily meet the statutory deadline.²

In Order No. PSC-2022-0438-PAA-WS, issued December 27, 2022, in Docket No. 20220005-WS, we, in keeping with the practice started in 1993, reiterated the alternatives which could be used to calculate the indexing of utility revenues. Past concerns expressed by utilities, as summarized from utility input in previous hearings, are:

- 1) Inflation should be a major factor in determining the index;
- 2) Nationally published indices should be vital to this determination;
- 3) Major categories of expenses are labor, chemicals, materials and supplies, maintenance, transportation, and treatment expense;
- 4) An area wage survey, Dodge Building Cost Index, Consumer Price Index, and the GDP should be considered;
- 5) A broad measure index should be used; and
- 6) The index procedure should be easy to administer.

¹Order No. PSC-1993-0195-FOF-WS, issued February 9, 1993, in Docket No. 19930005-WS, *In re: Annual reestablishment of price increase or decrease index of major categories of operating costs incurred by water and wastewater utilities pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S.*

²Order No. PSC-1995-0202-FOF-WS, issued February 10, 1995, in Docket No. 19950005-WS, *In re: Annual reestablishment of price increase or decrease index of major categories of operating costs incurred by water and wastewater utilities pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S.*

Based upon these concerns, we have previously explored the following alternatives:

- 1) Survey of Regulated Water and Wastewater Utilities;
- 2) Consumer Price Index;
- 3) Florida Price Level Index;
- 4) Producer Price Index – previously the Wholesale Price Index; and
- 5) GDPDEF (replacing the GNPDEF).

Over the years, we rejected using the Survey of Regulated Water and Wastewater Utilities because using the results of a survey would allow utilities to pass on to customers all cost increases, thereby reducing the incentives of promoting efficiency and productivity. We have also rejected using the Consumer Price Index and the Florida Price Level Index because of their limited degree of applicability to the water and wastewater industry. Both of these price indices are based upon comparing the advance in prices of a limited number of general goods and, therefore, have limited application to water and wastewater utilities.

The Producer Price Index (PPI) is a family of indices that measure the average change over time in selling prices received by domestic producers of goods and services. We rejected using PPI because it measures price change from the perspective of the seller, not the purchaser. The bases for these indices have not changed, and the conclusions reached in Order No. PSC-2022-0438-PAA-WS continue to apply in this case. Since 1993, we have found that the GDPDEF has a greater degree of applicability to the water and wastewater industry. Therefore, we will continue to use the GDPDEF to calculate water and wastewater price level adjustments. We will calculate the 2024 Price Index by using a fiscal year, four quarter comparison of the GDPDEF ending with the third quarter of 2023.

The following information provides a historical perspective of the annual price index:

Table 0
Historical Analysis of the Annual Price Index for Water and Wastewater Utilities

Year	Commission Approved Index	Year	Commission Approved Index
2013	1.63%	2019	2.36%
2014	1.41%	2020	1.79%
2015	1.57%	2021	1.17%
2016	1.29%	2022	4.53%
2017	1.51%	2023	7.07%
2018	1.79%	2024	3.24%

The table below shows the historical participation in the index and/or pass-through programs:

Table 2
Percentage of Jurisdictional Water and Wastewater Utilities Filing for Indexes and Pass-Throughs

Year	Percentage	Year	Percentage
2012	30%	2018	42%
2013	41%	2019	60%
2014	39%	2020	43%
2015	49%	2021	52%
2016	38%	2022	57%
2017	37%	2023	53%

II. Rate for the 2024 Price Index

The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, released the most recent third quarter 2023 figures on October 26, 2023. Consistent with our establishment of the 2023 Price Index last year, we are using the third quarter amounts to calculate the 2024 Price Index. Using the third quarter amounts allows time for us to establish the 2024 Price Index by March 31, 2024, in accordance with Section 367.081(4)(a), F.S. The percentage change in the GDPDEF using the fiscal year comparison ending with the third quarter is 3.24 percent. This number was calculated as follows.

GDPDEF Index for the fiscal year ended 9/30/23	122.817
GDPDEF Index for the fiscal year ended 9/30/22	<u>118.962</u>
Difference	3.855
Divided by 9/30/22 GDPDEF Index	<u>118.962</u>
2024 Price Index	<u><u>3.24%</u></u>

III. Notice of Indexing Requirements

The package in Attachment 1, attached hereto, shall be sent to every regulated water and wastewater utility after the expiration of the proposed agency action (PAA) protest period, along with a copy of the PAA Order once final. The entire package shall also be made available on our website.

In an effort to increase the number of water and wastewater utilities taking advantage of the annual price index and pass-through programs, Attachment 2 from the Director of the Division of Accounting and Finance shall be included with the PAA Order in order to explain the purpose of the index and pass-through applications and to communicate that Commission staff is available to assist them.

Based on the foregoing, it is

ORDERED by the Florida Public Service Commission that the Gross Domestic Product Implicit Price Deflator Index shall be used in calculating price level adjustments. We calculate the 2024 Price Index by using a fiscal year, four quarter comparison of the Implicit Price Deflator Index ending with the third quarter of 2023. It is further

ORDERED that the 2024 Price Index for water and wastewater utilities shall be 3.24 percent. It is further

ORDERED that after the expiration of the Proposed Agency Action protest period, the Division of Accounting and Finance shall send each regulated water and wastewater utility a copy of the PAA order establishing index containing the information presented in Attachment 1 along with a cover letter from the Director of the Division of Accounting and Finance. The entire package shall also be available on our website. It is further

ORDERED that, upon expiration of the 14-day protest period, if a timely protest is not received, the decision shall become final and effective upon the issuance of a Consummating Order. Any party filing a protest shall be required to prefile testimony with the protest. However, this docket shall remain open through the end of the year and be closed upon the establishment of the new docket in January 2024.

By ORDER of the Florida Public Service Commission this 21st day of December, 2023.



ADAM J. TEITZMAN
Commission Clerk
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
(850) 413-6770
www.floridapsc.com

Copies furnished: A copy of this document is provided to the parties of record at the time of issuance and, if applicable, interested persons.

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NOTICE OF FURTHER PROCEEDINGS OR JUDICIAL REVIEW

The Florida Public Service Commission is required by Section 120.569(1), Florida Statutes, to notify parties of any administrative hearing that is available under Section 120.57, Florida Statutes, as well as the procedures and time limits that apply. This notice should not be construed to mean all requests for an administrative hearing will be granted or result in the relief sought.

Mediation may be available on a case-by-case basis. If mediation is conducted, it does not affect a substantially interested person's right to a hearing.

The action proposed herein is preliminary in nature. Any person whose substantial interests are affected by the action proposed by this order may file a petition for a formal proceeding, in the form provided by Rule 28-106.201, Florida Administrative Code. This petition must be received by the Office of Commission Clerk, 2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0850, by the close of business on January 4, 2024.

In the absence of such a petition, this order shall become final and effective upon the issuance of a Consummating Order.

Any objection or protest filed in this/these docket(s) before the issuance date of this order is considered abandoned unless it satisfies the foregoing conditions and is renewed within the specified protest period.

FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
 PRICE INDEX APPLICATION
 APPLICABLE TEST YEAR _____

Department of Environmental Protection Public Water System ID NO. _____
 Department of Environmental Protection Wastewater Treatment Plant ID NO. _____

	WATER	WASTEWATER
Operation & Maintenance Expenses ¹	\$ _____	\$ _____
LESS:		
(a) Pass-through Items:		
(1) Purchased Power	_____	_____
(2) Purchased Water	_____	_____
(3) Purchased Wastewater Treatment	_____	_____
(4) Sludge Removal	_____	_____
(5) Other ²	_____	_____
(b) Rate Case Expense Included in Expenses	_____	_____
(c) Adjustments to Operation & Maintenance Expenses from last rate case, if applicable: ³		
(1) _____	_____	_____
(2) _____	_____	_____
Costs to be Indexed	\$ _____	\$ _____
Multiply by Annual Commission-Approved Price Index	<u>3.24%</u>	<u>3.24%</u>
Total Indexed Costs	\$ _____	\$ _____
Add Change in Pass-Through Items: ⁴		
(1) _____	_____	_____
(2) _____	_____	_____
Divide Index and Pass-Through Sum by Expansion Factor for Regulatory Assessment Fees	<u>.955</u>	<u>.955</u>
Increase in Revenue	_____	_____
Divide by Applicable Test Year Revenue ⁵	\$ _____	\$ _____
Percentage Increase in Rates	_____ %	_____ %
	=====	=====

FOOTNOTES APPEAR ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

PAGE 1 FOOTNOTES

¹This amount must match last year's annual report.

²Other expense items may include increases in required Department of Environmental Protection testing, ad valorem taxes, permit fees charged by the Department of Environmental Protection or a local government authority, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System fees, and regulatory assessment fees. These items should not be currently embedded in the utility's rates.

³This may include adjustments that follow a methodology referenced in the Order from a utility's last rate case (i.e. averaged bad debt expense or excessive unaccounted for water percentage applied to chemicals expense).

⁴This may include an increase in purchased power, purchased water, purchased wastewater treatment, sludge hauling, required Department of Environmental Protection testing, ad valorem taxes, and permit fees charged by the Department of Environmental Protection or a local government authority providing that those increases have been incurred within the 12-month period prior to the submission of the pass-through application. Pass-through National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System fees and increases in regulatory assessment fees are eligible as pass-through costs but not subject to the twelve month rule. All pass-through items require invoices. See Rule 25-30.425, F.A.C. for more information.

⁵If rates changed after January 1 of the applicable test year, the book revenues must be adjusted to show the changes and an explanation of the calculation should be attached to this form. See Annualized Revenue Worksheet for instructions and a sample format.

ANNUALIZED REVENUE WORKSHEET

Have the rates charged for customer services changed since January 1, of the applicable test year?

- () If no, the utility should use actual revenues. This form may be disregarded.
- () If yes, the utility must annualize its revenues. Read the remainder of this form.

Annualizing calculates the revenues the utility would have earned based upon the previous year's customer consumption at the most current rates in effect. To complete this calculation, the utility will need consumption data for the previous year to apply to the existing rate schedule. Below is a sample format which may be used.

CALCULATION OF ANNUALIZED REVENUES*
 Consumption Data for Applicable Test Year

	Number of Bill/Gal. Sold	X	Current Rates	Annualized Revenues
Residential Service:				
Bills:				
5/8"x3/4" meters	_____		_____	_____
1" meters	_____		_____	_____
1 2" meters	_____		_____	_____
2" meters	_____		_____	_____
Gallons Sold	_____		_____	_____
General Service:				
Bills:				
5/8"x3/4" meters	_____		_____	_____
1" meters	_____		_____	_____
1 2" meters	_____		_____	_____
2" meters	_____		_____	_____
3" meters	_____		_____	_____
4" meters	_____		_____	_____
6" meters	_____		_____	_____
Gallons Sold	_____		_____	_____
Total Annualized Revenues for the Applicable Test Year				\$ _____

*Annualized revenues must be calculated separately if the utility consists of both a water system and a wastewater system. This form is designed specifically for utilities using a base facility charge rate structure. If annualized revenues must be calculated and further assistance is needed, contact the Commission Staff at (850) 413-6900.

AFFIRMATION

I, _____, hereby affirm that the figures and calculations upon which the change in rates is based are accurate and that the change will not cause _____ to exceed the range of its last authorized rate of return on equity, which is _____.

(name of utility)

I, the undersigned/officer of the above-named utility, have read the foregoing and declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information contained in this application is true and correct.

This affirmation is made pursuant to my request for a price index and/or pass-through rate increase, in conformance with Section 367.081(4), Florida Statutes.

Further, I am aware that pursuant to Section 837.06, Florida Statutes, whoever knowingly makes a false statement in writing with the intent to mislead a public servant in the performance of his official duty shall be guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree.

Signature: _____
Title: _____
Telephone Number: _____
Fax Number: _____

Sworn to and subscribed before me this _____ day of _____, 20__.

My Commission expires:

(SEAL)

Notary Public
State of Florida

STATEMENT OF QUALITY OF SERVICE

Pursuant to paragraphs 25-30.420(2)(h) and (i), Florida Administrative Code,

(name of utility)

[] does not have any active written complaints, corrective orders, consent orders, or outstanding citations with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) or the County Health Departments.

[] does have the attached active written complaint(s), corrective order(s), consent order(s), or outstanding citation(s) with the DEP or the County Health Department(s). The attachment(s) includes the specific system(s) involved with DEP permit number and the nature of the active complaint, corrective order, consent order, or outstanding citation.

This statement is intended such that the Florida Public Service Commission can make a determination of quality of service pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), Florida Statutes, and Rule 25-30.420(4)(a), Florida Administrative Code.

Name: _____
Title: _____
Telephone Number: _____
Fax Number: _____
Date: _____

Exception

_____ hereby waives the right to implement
(name of utility)
a pass-through rate increase within 45 days of filing, as provided by Section 367.081(4)(b),
Florida Statutes, in order that the pass-through and index rate increase may both be implemented
together 60 days after the official filing date of this notice of intention.

Signature: _____

Title: _____

(To be used if an index and pass-through rate increase are requested jointly.)

NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS

Pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(a), Florida Statutes, water and wastewater utilities are permitted to adjust the rates and charges to its customers without those customers bearing the additional expense of a public hearing. These adjustments in rates would depend on increases or decreases in non-controllable expenses subject to inflationary pressures such as chemicals, and other general operation and maintenance costs.

On _____, _____ filed its notice of
(date) (name of utility)
intention with the Florida Public Service Commission to increase water and wastewater rates in _____ County pursuant to this Statute. The filing is subject to review by the Commission Staff for accuracy and completeness. Water rates will increase by approximately _____% and wastewater rates by _____%. These rates should be reflected for service rendered on or after _____.
(date)

NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS

Pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(b), Florida Statutes, water and wastewater utilities are permitted to pass through, without a public hearing, a change in rates resulting from: an increase or decrease in rates charged for utility services received from a governmental agency or another regulated utility and which services were redistributed by the utility to its customers; an increase or decrease in the rates that it is charged for electric power, the amount of ad valorem taxes assessed against its used and useful property, the fees charged by the Department of Environmental Protection in connection with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Program, or the regulatory assessment fees imposed upon it by the Commission; costs incurred for water quality or wastewater quality testing required by the Department of Environmental Protection; the fees charged for wastewater bio solids disposal; costs incurred for any tank inspection required by the Department of Environmental Protection or a local governmental authority; treatment plant and water distribution system operator license fees required by the Department of Environmental Protection or a local governmental authority; water or wastewater operating permit fees charged by the Department of Environmental Protection or a local governmental authority; and consumptive or water use permit fees charged by a water management district.

On _____, _____ filed its notice of
(date) (name of utility)
intention with the Florida Public Service Commission to increase water and wastewater rates in _____ County pursuant to this Statute. The filing is subject to review by the Commission Staff for accuracy and completeness. Water rates will increase by approximately _____% and wastewater rates by _____%. These rates should be reflected on your bill for service rendered on or after _____.
(date)

If you should have any questions, please contact your local utility office. Be sure to have account number handy for quick reference.

STATE OF FLORIDA

Commissioners:
Mike La Rosa, Chairman
Art Graham
Gary F. Clark
Andrew Giles Fay
Gabriella Passidomo



DIVISION OF
ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE
ANDREW L. MAUREY
DIRECTOR
(850) 413-6900

Public Service Commission

Month Day, 2023

All Florida Public Service Commission
Regulated Water & Wastewater Utilities

Re: Docket No. 20230005-WS - 2024 Price Index

Dear Utility Owner:

Since March 31, 1981, pursuant to the guidelines established by Section 367.081(4)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.), and Rule 25-30.420, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), the Commission has established a price increase or decrease index for major categories of operating costs. This process allows water and wastewater utilities to adjust rates based on current specific expenses without applying for a rate case. The intent of this rule is to ensure that inflationary pressures are not detrimental to utility owners, and that any possible deflationary pressures are not adverse to customers. By keeping up with index and pass-through adjustments, utility operations can be maintained at a level sufficient to ensure quality of service for the customers.

Pursuant to Rule 25-30.420(1)(a), F.A.C., all operation and maintenance expenses shall be indexed with the exception of:

- a) Pass-through items pursuant to Section 367.081(4)(b), F.S.;
- b) Any amortization of rate case expense; and
- c) Disallowances or adjustments made in an applicant's most recent rate proceeding.

Please note that all sludge removal expense should now be removed from operation and maintenance expenses for the purpose of indexing. Incremental increases in this category of expense may now be recovered using a pass-through request.

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Regulated Water & Wastewater Utilities
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Upon the filing of a request for an index and/or pass-through increase, staff will review the application and modify existing rates accordingly. If for no other reason than to keep up with escalating costs, utilities throughout Florida should file for this rate relief on an annual basis. Utilities may apply for a 2024 Price Index anytime between April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025 by mail or by emailing Applications@psc.state.fl.us. The attached package will answer questions regarding what the index and pass-through rate adjustments are, how to apply for an adjustment, and what needs to be filed in order to meet the filing requirements. For your convenience, the Commission-approved Price Index is reflected on Form PSC 1022, attached. While the increase for any given year may be minor, (see chart below), the long-run effect of keeping current with rising costs can be substantial.

Year	Annual Commission Approved Index	Year	Annual Commission Approved Index
1999	1.21%	2012	2.41%
2000	1.36%	2013	1.63%
2001	2.50%	2014	1.41%
2002	2.33%	2015	1.57%
2003	1.31%	2016	1.29%
2004	1.60%	2017	1.51%
2005	2.17%	2018	1.76%
2006	2.74%	2019	2.36%
2007	3.09%	2020	1.79%
2008	2.39%	2021	1.17%
2009	2.55%	2022	4.53%
2010	0.56%	2023	7.07%
2011	1.18%	2023	3.24%

Please be aware that pursuant to Section 837.06, F.S., whoever knowingly makes a false statement in writing with the intent to mislead a public servant in the performance of his or her official duty shall be guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree. Our staff is available at (850) 413-6900 should you need assistance with your filing. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call.

Moreover, additional rate relief mechanisms are available to water and wastewater utilities as alternatives to full rate cases. Water and wastewater utilities whose total gross annual operating revenues are \$335,000 or less for water service or \$335,000 or less for wastewater service, or \$670,000 or less on a combined basis, may petition the Commission for staff assistance in

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alternative rate setting. Please refer to Rule 25-30.456, F.A.C., for additional details. Furthermore, water utilities whose total gross annual operating revenues are \$335,000 or less and wastewater utilities whose total gross annual operating revenues are \$335,000 or less may file an application for a limited alternative rate increase of up to 20 percent applied to metered or flat recurring rates of all classes of service. Please refer to Rule 25-30.457, F.A.C., for additional details.

Finally, the Commission reminds water and wastewater utilities that the Utility Reserve Fund exists to help address concerns over deferred maintenance of critical infrastructure and delays in necessary repairs. The availability of the reserve funds may allow a utility to avoid or defer the need for a future rate case, the expenses of which are ultimately borne by customers. Please refer to Rule 25-30.444, F.A.C., for additional details.

Sincerely,

Andrew L. Maurey
Director

Enclosures