

There's gold in your utility bills!

by Erin Kelly

As a prior property manager, I approved approximately two dozen bills daily! Of these bills, the majority were almost always utility bills.

Trying to intelligently decipher and understand a utility bill is like trying to read Latin when you don't have a translation book. Terms like TOU-GS-1, GMC, CONST, KW, EST, ACT, SSC, climate zone 1, billing factors and energy adjustment factors are common- place on each of the bills sent by utility companies. In addition, who can keep up with the constant stream of new rates, smart meters, rate changes, billing seasons and pro-rated fees?

Try to call the customer service departments of these utility companies to actually ask what these terms mean! After being transferred 20 times and 30 minutes later, you might find someone in some obscure department who will call you back after he "researches your account." Of course, you never receive that call!

About the best that any property manager or accountant can do to ease his or her mind when they authorize the payment of these utility bills is to check last year's usage as compared to this year's usage. If the two figures were within 20 percent of each other, I was satisfied.

However, what happens when you receive a whopping \$2,000 bill on a meter that is generally \$200.00 each month? Well, if you are like me, you call the utility company and demand an explanation. Of course, they cannot provide you with an explanation. However, after 10 minutes of listening to you screaming, they agree

to send out a meter reader (probably the same one who made the mistake) and call you back. When they don't call you back, you call them only to find out that the reading is verified and "although this is an unusually high bill for you, you must pay for the service or it will be turned off." Now, try explaining to 200 residents why their spa is not hot, or the elevator is not working or there is no air-conditioning....!

Have you actually ever gone out and physically checked each of the meters that you are paying for each month? With the number of units that I managed, this would be almost impossible, and I wouldn't know what I was looking for or at anyway!

The bottom line is that there are certified public accountants that I hired to file taxes and audit financial statements, there are attorneys I hired to review legal issues, contracts and leases, there are reserve companies that I hired to perform annual reserve studies, consultants of all types that I hired to research roofs, soil compaction, construction defects, etc., and there are engineers that I hired to write reports on the physical components of buildings. These are all areas of expertise that require experienced professionals. I would not have been asked to perform any of these duties. However, for some strange reason, I am supposed to audit the association's monthly utility bills, explain higher-than-normal utility bills, and know how to deal with the utility companies???

A property manager can spend hours and hours dealing with a single high utility bill and still not get the issue resolved, or be able to explain the reason for the unusually high bill. And, try explaining why the water budget

has been exceeded by 25% this year!?! The answer to that question could take weeks to answer!

Utility bills are no different. They are confusing at best, and, if you say the wrong thing to the utility companies, you have a good chance of being retroactively billed for undercharges, and the bills will be even higher in the future! This is an area of expertise that should also be handled by a professional.

Now you can hire utility auditors to do this work for you! Pacific Utility Audit can obtain substantial refunds and credit adjustments for past utility overcharges, in addition to obtaining the lowest possible utility rates available in the future. Also, we will audit all of the utility bills that you receive on an ongoing basis in the future, so you don't have to! There is no fee because we work on a contingency basis only.

This is NOT energy auditing, where a company changes your equipment, or changes how or when you use your utilities, or installs energy efficient equipment to reduce your overall utility consumption. Utility auditing is only concerned with 1) verifying that you are being billed correctly, and 2) **reducing your per-unit utility cost, not the amount you use**, and 3) placing you on the least expensive utility rates available now, and in the future!

Many times overcharges are found, resulting in refunds and credit adjustments, and you receive a Utility Audit Analysis Summary report from a utility **professional**, so you know that your utility bills are correct, which is why we say "There's gold in your utility bills!"

