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## BMC to decide on bill for big water users

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Mumbai: The BMC's Standing Committee this Friday will take a call on two important policy decisions that may change the way the city uses its water. The first is the "telescopic structure for water charges" (where households that consume a lot of water will have to pay through their nose); the second is the controversial move to instal pre-paid meters in slums that have come up after 1995.

Metered charges for every 1000 litres are Rs 3.50 in residential complexes, Rs 2.25 in slums and between Rs 18 and Rs 25 for commercial and industrial units.

Once the telescopic rates come into force, households and commercial establishments — which consume up to 150 litres a person a day — will be charged similarly. And rates will go up exponentially; so, if daily usage exceeds 200 litres for each person, it will be double the rate for 150 litres.

But it will be a while before the policy is fully in place as more than half the water-meters are non-functional. "We will be putting up the proposal, for installing (or replacing) meters wherever necessary, in the next one month. The process was delayed due to some issues," hydraulic engineer M M Kamble said.

The second proposal has already angered water activists and slum-dwellers. Their demand is for normal water connections like the rest of the city has instead of pre-paid meters. Most post-1995 slums do not have any access to legal connections and get water by tampering with pipes.

The BMC now plans to give them stand-post connections like those given to dwellers staying in regularised shanties; the only difference will be the pre-paid meters. Residents will have to purchase "water credits", which will be loaded on to their "water cards". Each time they want to draw water, they will have to insert the card in the community stand-post.

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