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Water utility seeks 13.6 percent rate hike

TOM BALDWIN
STAFF WRITER

MONROE — New Jersey American Water, which provides water to 182 New Jersey municipalities, is seeking a rate hike of about 23 cents per day, or about \$7.10 added onto a consumer's monthly bill, the company said.

"New Jersey American Water is confronting the serious need to replace aging infrastructure and deliver high-quality, reliable water service to the 2.5 million people we serve in New Jersey," said company President John Bigelow in a news release.

"Water remains one of the lowest utility bills for a household and our customers will continue to pay less than a penny a gallon," he said after the company filed the request with the state's Board of Public Utilities.

"What do you pay for cable?" asked company spokesman Peter Eschbach. "Our average cost per customer is about half of that," adding that an average household water bill is in the neighborhood of \$49 to \$50 a month.

Doyal Siddell, spokesman for the BPU, said state law allows the board nine months to hand the request to an administrative law judge and to hold hearings. He said that as of Friday morning no hearings had been scheduled.

In response to the request, one state lawmaker representing parts of Mercer and southern Middlesex County objected, saying the 13.6-percent hike would affect people in his district, which includes Plainsboro, Cranbury, South Brunswick, Monroe, Jamesburg and West Windsor.

Republican state Sen. Tom Goodwin said he asked the BPU to turn down the rate-hike request.

"Many of the residents in my district live on fixed incomes and struggle every month to pay their bills. This rate increase would put a tremendous strain on their finances," he wrote.