

Small Steps
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In my last article I explained my new position. Before, I created Wellhead protection plans for communities. Now I work with implementation and planning for communities that already have an approved wellhead protection plan in conjunction with a nitrate problem. Today I would like to talk to you all about some small steps we can all make to help protect our source water, whether it be groundwater or surface water. When I was working for a small town in the southeast part of the state that was experiencing growth, I noticed with a new house usually came an underground sprinkler system. These underground sprinkler systems worked great - set the system to come on in the middle of the night and you practically never have to think about it again until winter. Yes, they worked great rain or shine. These automated sprinkler systems come on at same time to water the lawn every day. We have all seen it raining, or right after a rain, and someone's sprinklers are still going full blast. This was one thing I never understood with today's technology and the price of a sprinkler system, how much more would it cost to put a rain sensor on it. To find out I did a simple search "rain sensor for a sprinkler system" I pulled up several different types of rain sensing units. These units ranged in price from \$70 for just rain sensor system to \$500 that included rain sensor; freeze sensor, and moisture sensor for your complete sprinkler system needs. With all the new technology out there why do people go ahead and spend the money on an underground sprinkler system, and not install a rain sensor or check their timers once in a while. I believe it because most people do not know that rain sensors exist, or just forget about their sprinkler systems all together. This is where the Municipalities need to step in and help educate their citizens on what is out there for water conservation. Most of the rain sensor units are wireless so installation should be easier than in the past. Also putting out a flyer in people's water bills could help remind them to check their timers or tell them when it is the best time to water. These are just a few things we can do to help with the water conservation fight.

Although, why stop at rain sensors, why not encourage some other practices and products to help your town conserve water. The planting of low maintenance grasses can help. The low maintenance part means it only requires ¼ inch of water a week to stay healthy, not that you can plant it and forget it. With these low maintenance grasses, summer water consumption should start to decline as more and more people plant these types of grasses. In new construction areas, especially, where lawn preparation is needed why not encourage people to put in a grass that will require less water during hot summer months. These low maintenance grasses have already been used at many county and state buildings. There is no better way to tell people the benefit of low maintenance grasses than through the municipal office, not to mention the money people can save. Now when people ask what they can do to keep their water bill down you can explain how low maintenance grasses can help them save money and help your municipality with their conservation efforts.

Finally, one of the best ways to help with the water conservation fight, is water tracking. Most systems already do this but there are still some that can only speculate when they have a leak. By metering your system, reading it daily and monthly on the consumers' meters, you can create a water budget that will show the amount of water you pumped to town, and how much was actually used. Usually if you have 10%-15% or less water loss you are doing pretty good. If you have higher than that maybe it time to see if you have a leak. Here at Rural Water one of our circuit riders would gladly help you pinpoint leaks in your system with our leak detection equipment. But, remember when doing a water budget, try to account for the water that is not metered like fire hydrates and sometimes water used at the fire station or municipal office. Otherwise you make think you have a leak when you really do not. If we all would take a few **small steps** toward water conservation we will all be able to enjoy the precious natural resource that we call water for years to come.