

It's That Time of Year...

Clancy Dempsey, Ground Water Specialist

...to be thinking about water conservation. Competition for a limited supply of water resources, population growth, and frequency of drought are factors that make water conservation increasingly important. The resulting demand on the aquifers, rivers, and reservoirs that make up our sources of drinking water is staggering. The average American uses 100 gallons (or more) of water a day. If demand can be decreased, and especially if waste of water can be decreased, more water will be available for us in the future. If conservation measures can be implemented on a community-wide basis, the municipality and the water system customers may save a great deal of money in the long run by deferring the cost of a new well or wells to meet demand for water. This can be a hard idea to sell to residents, as most of us like to maintain a lush, green lawn, and we like to keep our vehicles sparkling, shiny, and clean, and we like a long, hot shower...you get the idea. For water systems that are concerned about efficient use of water, here are some ideas that promote wise water use in your community:

Encourage homeowners to look for leaks. Put a few drops of food coloring in the toilet tank. If the color appears in the bowl without flushing, there is a leak. A toilet that leaks a gallon of water per hour wastes up to 8,760 gallons a year. A faucet that drips one drop per second can add up to 2,700 gallons per year. That's a lot of water that can be saved by replacing a ten-cent washer.

Never pour water down the drain if there is another use for it around the house. Part of my early morning and evening routine is replenishing the dog's bucket of drinking water. Rather than dumping it wherever it is convenient, I take the time to water backyard plants, shrubs, and trees. By doing this, I have never had to drag a hose around the backyard even during the hottest time of summer.

Wash your car on the lawn to help keep the grass green. Water on the driveway usually runs to the street, then down to a storm water drain, without benefiting your lawn. The soaps you use get pretty well diluted and shouldn't harm the grass or plants. My wife and I started doing this last summer, and noticed that neighbors have started to do the same.

Water efficient clothes washers use 35 to 50 percent less water than a conventional water and use 50 percent less electricity per load. So although they initially cost more, the monthly savings on your energy bill will make up for it over time. Toilets are the number one water user in most homes. A family of three replacing a five gallon per flush model with a 1.6 gallon per flush model would conserve 18,600 gallons of water per year.

Most automatic lawn sprinkler systems can be equipped with an automatic rain sensor that will prevent the sprinkler system from running if a certain amount of rain falls.

So how do we get this information to the public? Include a water conservation tip on the monthly water bill. Have a water conservation message printed in the local paper on a

regular basis. Create a door hanger with conservation information that could be left behind when making rounds to read meters. Convincing residents to change their water use habits is not always easy, but the long term benefits are worth the time and effort it takes.