

Water Conservation Program

By Doug Osburn

Good management of a water system should include an active water conservation program. Residents in Oregon have in the past, assumed that we had an infinite supply of water to be used. Recently, we have been made aware that this is not the case. The reality is we do have enough water, if we use it wisely. This will require system managers to incorporate methods to eliminate wasteful practices. Some of these methods will require the customers to make changes and it will be necessary for the system to change some of its practices also.

An effective program needs to be a written document adopted by the governing body of the water system. It should outline what are allowable and non-allowable practices within the system's jurisdiction. Items to be considered for your written programs could be:

- 1) Annual water audit.
- 2) Source master meter and annual calibration.
- 3) All services metered with a meter replacement program in place.
- 4) System leak loss of 15% or less.
- 5) Accounting for all water used ie: line flushing, fire department, etc...
- 6) Public education.
- 7) Incentives that encourage conservation.
- 8) Adoption of rate structures that encourage water conservation.

These items are all important but public education and incentives for reducing water consumption are probably the most critical for good overall success.

Public education can be done through mailings, web sites and training classes. Encourage local retailers to sell low-flow alternative fixtures. You can educate your customers to different ways to irrigate their lawns and yards. Don't forget to tell them about drip irrigation for their flower beds and gardens as one alternative to sprinkling. To better able educate the public, you must be educated first. You need to be able to offer alternatives that are viable. Remember, it's easy to point out problems but without good solutions, it's all for naught.

You and your staff need to set the example by ensuring your system is efficient by eliminating leaks, and dead end lines to reduce flushing. If you have a sewer plant, there is the possibility of effluent reuse for irrigation within your boundaries.

Don't be afraid to point out the steps you have taken to correct inefficiencies as it will be easier to ask your customers to try to use less water and not waste it.

If your program is successful, you might realize that you don't need to drill a new well after all. The water conservation program could be your least costly alternative.

That's all for this time...I'll see you down the road. Don't forget to practice your ping-pong!