Publications

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Urban Water Conservation along the Rio Grande

Valeen Silvy, Ronald Kaiser, Bruce Lesikar, Craig Runyan

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Not long ago, conversations on urban water demand were not only rare but dull. Today, especially in the West and Southwest, these conversations can turn into heated debates. The question of who has enough water for the future has pitted urban interests against agriculture and financial resources against cultural values.

Water supply is finite, even if it is part of a cycle. Water may be plentiful in some places and scarce in others. Until we are ready to make water conservation a pattern of behavior to use less water, our demand will continue to grow as our population grows. Although water conservation is not an answer to all growth, it does offer an alternative to acquiring some new water supplies.

Water conservation is almost always the least expensive water supply alternative. Water conservation can have two definitions. First and most often, conservation is considered

a reduction in the amount of water used. Each person uses less. An alternative definition implies more efficient use of water. We waste less. Less waste can be attributed to best management practices, more efficient hardware or literally less water running into the streets from irrigation systems.

Urban water conservation incorporates watersaving measures and incentives for the home, on the landscape and throughout the city water distribution system. It is easy to differentiate between water-saving measures and incentives. A water-saving measure such as a water-efficient toilet reduces the amount used each and every time it is flushed. Or, a rain sensor turns off a sprinkler system during rain showers.

In contrast, incentives encourage the wise use of water through education, ordinances or scheduling. Educational programs suggest water reductions in the landscape, ordinances mandate how much turf is planted, and schedules tell homeowners when to irrigate. Combined, measures and incentives provide a water conservation program.

Texas Water Resources Institute

1500 Research Parkway A110
2260 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-2260

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Phone: 979.845.1851
Fax: 979.845.0662
Email: twri@tamu.edu

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