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Tucson Cracks Down on Outdoor Commercial Water Waste

September 7, 2007, Phoenix, Ariz.—Commercial property managers and owners in Tucson look out: If your irrigation system is producing runoff, or is flawed with a leaky valve, you could face a citation and fine from the City of Tucson.

Tucson Water is cracking down on outdoor water waste from commercial properties with their new Water Waste Violation Enforcement Process, a program that began in April to strictly enforce Tucson's Water Waste Ordinance by way of citations, fines, and continued education.

Passed in 1984 and later revised in 2000, the Water Waste Ordinance (Tucson Code 27-15) was created to conserve water and promote awareness about the negative effects of water waste.

“In the last few years, we have tried to influence compliance of this ordinance through public education initiatives,” said Ilene Grossman, Tucson Water's Commercial Conservation Coordinator. “We were still receiving the same complaints, however, and water waste issues weren't being resolved. We had to take a firmer approach to preventing water waste.”

When a violation is first observed by a City Conservation Inspector, a written notice requiring the violation to be corrected is presented to the commercial property owner or manager, along with education material about how to reduce water waste and where to go to get an irrigation audit conducted. If the problem is not corrected before the follow-up inspection, a citation and fine is issued. Fines range from \$250 for a first-time offense, to a maximum fine of \$2,500.

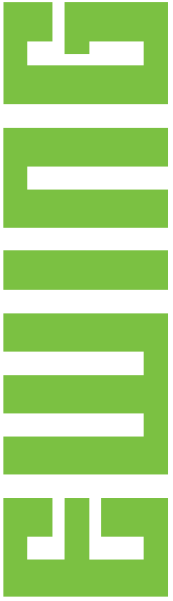
So far, the city has recorded citations for 16 commercial entities, most of which have repeated water waste offenses.

“Though we are issuing citations and fines, our main goal for the Water Waste Enforcement program is to mold positive change through education,” Grossman added.

Tips to Reduce Water Waste

Tucson Water “highly suggests” that commercial property managers have an irrigation system audit conducted on each of their properties.

“It makes sense for property managers to have an audit done so the overall health of a property's irrigation system is revealed,” Grossman said. “We like to compare irrigation system audits to having your A/C and heating units checked every year. It is a best practice to have your irrigation system checked annually so it works efficiently, and doesn't break down.”



Steve Montano, Water Management Specialist for Ewing Irrigation, has been helping several local commercial landscape companies develop waste-free irrigation systems.

“I am currently partnering with commercial properties that have been issued warnings or citations,” Montano said. “These properties have irrigation systems that produce substantial amounts of runoff, which leads to standing water. When this occurs, it leads to yet another problem—a breeding ground for mosquitoes.”

Montano agrees with Grossman, and said irrigation audits should be performed to document the problem areas and pinpoint water-saving opportunities.

“The benefit of an audit outweighs the initial cost of having the audit conducted,” Montano said. “Over time, a more efficient system will render reduced water costs, which will more than compensate for the initial cost.”

Craig Gibson, co-owner of Tucson-based Masters Landscape & Irrigation, works with about 50 commercial properties in the Tucson area, and said not all property managers are happy about the enforcement program, but they understand they have to fix their systems if they want to be fine-free.

In addition to fixing water waste problem areas, Gibson is recommending “smart” irrigation products to his clients.

“There are water-saving irrigation products out there like the MP Rotator, a rotating sprinkler nozzle that is a low-flow alternative to a traditional spray head,” he said. “These sprinklers not only prevent runoff on streets and sidewalks with their low precipitation rates, but they generally save 30 percent more water over spray heads.”

Tucson’s Conservation Culture

During the mid-1970s, the City of Tucson started the “Beat the Peak” program, their first water conservation program created to get Tucsonans to start saving water during the most water-guzzling times of the year.

At the time, the lone source of water was pumped groundwater, and groundwater levels were becoming increasingly low, sparking a need to get the public to save water.

Today, Tucson Water continues their “Beat the Peak” program with a new theme every year, and has also implemented several other educational water conservation programs, including their Water\$mart and SmartScape workshops.

“The long history of our water conservation programs has instilled a mindset in our customers that water should not be wasted,” Grossman said. “Our new water conservation initiatives are community driven. Water conservation is a part of our culture.”

Grossman said most commercial property managers who are approached with a warning are diligent in getting their irrigation systems fixed right away.

“We acknowledge that change is always hard, but conservation in the outdoor environment is something that has to happen for long-term sustainability,” she added.

For more information about the Water Waste Enforcement Process and a comprehensive list of water waste violations, visit www.tucsonaz.gov/water/conservation.