

Finalized by the NEWWA Conservation Committee 7/11/07

## **Conservation Outreach/Public Information Programs**

Outdoor water used to maintain lawns and landscapes is the most significant non-essential water use and is one that involves residential, commercial, and municipal water users. Building public awareness of the limitations of local water supplies, and the consequences of overuse through public outreach is a key component of developing and implementing a drought or water shortage plan. A well-informed community will understand that overuse of water supplies will not only impact nearby ecosystems, but also threaten the availability of water for more essential purposes (such as drinking, or fire protection) and will respond more readily when asked to minimize non-essential water use. Public outreach should also appeal to the needs of different customer classes. For example, small business customers may require a different outreach strategy than residential customers with large landscapes.

A sequential, ongoing public outreach education program is the backbone of any water conservation program. The sequence of the program is important, with more general education (raising consciousness about the importance of water conservation) preceding outreach aimed at changing or regulating customer behavior. The following components should be considered:

- **Press:** Local press is often the best venue for distributing information about water conservation. Water suppliers could cultivate relationships with editors and reporters, educating them so that they may in turn help educate the public. Consider sending them pre-written releases or columns; often this saves them time and allows you to get your message out directly to the public. Paid advertising and public service announcements have also proven an effective venue.
- **Information center:** Water suppliers could set up easily-accessible areas, and on-line sources, where the public can pick up basic brochures, references, etc, on water conservation topics.
- **Newsletters:** Regular newsletters are an invaluable means to provide ongoing outreach and education on conservation-related topics.
- **Website:** Water suppliers should utilize their websites to post conservation related materials.
- **High user programs:** Many water suppliers may be able to most efficiently and dramatically manage their demand by working directly with their highest users (residential and commercial.) Re-education may be needed to dispel some of the myths that perpetuate over-watering.
- **School education programs:** Schools are an excellent venue to deliver local conservation ideas and values. Many elementary schools are looking for relevant curriculum that fits into the state science and standards, and links into the community.
- **Community displays:** Local libraries, town halls and events are often excellent venues for displaying conservation related materials.
- **Demonstration garden/landscapes:** Some utilities have sited drought-tolerant demonstration gardens on their grounds or in other public places. Plants could be labeled and “how to” information should be provided for reference.

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- **Water bills:** Water Bills could be used to show seasonal usage fluctuations, usage history, gallon-per-day, or comparisons to “average” use. Bill stuffers could contain conservation tips. Frequent billing (at least quarterly) better allows users to make connections between past use and amount charged.
- **Fact sheets or brochures** on a variety of water conservation topics (e.g. indoor, outdoor, water-efficient appliances) When appropriate, materials should be provided in different languages.
- **Outdoor advertising** (e.g., billboards, sandwich boards)
- **Broadcast programs** on cable TV.
- **Conservation retrofit devices:** Could be provided free, at-cost, or via rebates.
- **Conservation audit programs:** Could be provided free or at-cost. Should include before and after surveys with published results.
- **Collaboration with community groups (such as service organizations, scouting groups and garden clubs):** on conservation-related topics of mutual interest.
- **Award and recognition programs:** For residents and businesses that have made gains in water conservation.
- **Collaboration of all water users:** Commercial, residential, municipal, and those on private wells work together in the spirit of public good.
- **Providing speakers** to community, business, youth and neighborhood groups
- **Promote the importance of water conservation:** Within all town government sectors
- **Promote the importance of water conservation:** Within all developers/contractors working within the community.

Effective communication needs to capture the recipient’s attention. Studies have shown that boring, inconspicuous flyers and pamphlets are often ignored by the public. Information that is vivid, concrete and personal is more likely to be noticed and acted on. Other ways to ensure successful public outreach efforts include:

- Have an organization or individual that is credible with target audience deliver the message.
- Communication, especially if it includes instructions for a desired behavior, needs to be clear and specific.
- Make it easy for people to remember what to do, and how and when to do it.
- Provide feedback to customers on their water conservation efforts.

The preceding outreach/education activities are recommended prior to, and accompanying the implementation of outdoor water use restrictions. It has been shown that conducting comprehensive public outreach and education is critical to successful implementation of any conservation-based restrictions.