

Landlords Get Flushed Down the Drain
by the Los Angeles DWP
by Marvin Fleschman, CAPS

There's an old saying, "I've only been wrong once in my life and that was when I thought I was wrong."

In 1992, the LA-DWP offered an unbelievable water conservation program whereby they were giving FREE low-flow toilets to apartment owners as an incentive to change from the age-old toilets that were using 7 gallons of water to flush 6 oz of waste.

Good idea to conserve water? Yes. Good idea to lower your water bills? Sounds great! To my extreme surprise, I felt I had at last found the true "free lunch." Against all that I had believed about government waste, bureaucratic bumbling, and incompetence, I had found the exception that disproved the rule. I even wrote an article complimenting LA-DWP and extolling the advantages of this wonderful program for owners to lower their water bills and help Southern California save water. Well folks, here we are 6 years later and I'm sorry to say that I was wrong in believing I was wrong. My low opinion of the competency of the leaders we entrust to spend our public funds wisely has turned out not to be low enough.

From the outset, landlords were complaining that they didn't see much savings in their water bills. The problem seemed to be that because of a design-flaw it took several flushes to get rid of solids, which meant that tenants were using MORE water to clear the low-flow toilet than the old 7-gallon toilets used. Now the LA-DWP has started a new FREE toilet program. Recognizing the design problems of the previous low-flow toilets, they are now offering the Niagara brand toilet that solves the design-flaw by having a LARGER HOLE, which easily allows the solids to pass through with one flush. In addition, they have no flapper and no ballcock parts to need periodic maintenance or replacement.

As they say on the TV infomercials "But, wait, you get more!" They are not only providing this toilet free, but are including FREE installation! Isn't this the best program for us landlords you ever heard of? NOT ON YOUR LIFE! **It seems that all of us who were suckered into the first water conservation toilet exchange program are NOT eligible to do another exchange!** What's on my mind is that somebody at the LA-DWP has to be big enough to admit a mistake was made in their rush to have us change to low-flow toilets. Somebody out there in LA-DWP-land has to take a big gulp and admit that they made a bad choice of manufacturer and wasted a lot of money on a program, which distributed a toilet that doesn't conserve water. Now that I know about the Niagara design, I would love to put them in all my rental units -- but at \$130 each, plus installation, I'm not about to change over. If the goal of the City of Los Angeles is REALLY to conserve water, they are not going to accomplish much by refusing to exchange the low-flows that were THEIR choice at the time. As long as their bad choice of toilets remain in use, the pre-'92 level of water consumption will remain a problem and not be reduced.

Mr. Tom Gackstetter, Water Conservation Manager of LA-DWP quotes their customer satisfaction surveys that people are happy with the toilet exchange program and report a savings on their water bills. I have been at ground level, dealing with owners and managers since the program began in 1992 and my own experience finds MOST owners are NOT satisfied with the new toilets or their water savings. If you would like to make your experience or opinion known, Mr. Gackstetter welcomes your input. Contact him by email at thomas.gackstetter@ladwp.com or mail this article to him at LA-DWP, 111 North Hope Street, Room 1463, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

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