

Want to Save Thousands on Water Bills and Maintenance?

By Bill Kabaker

For many years the subject of water conservation has been discussed by water utilities and conservation groups. Residents of Southern California actually did a commendable job of reducing water consumption by nearly 20% in the most recent drought of 1998 –2000.

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Due to a number of factors, water conservation will continue to be a concern for property owners throughout the west. Particularly in Southern California, water utilities, especially the Metropolitan Water District (MWD), has had supplies redirected to Arizona, from The Colorado River project. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) water supply from the Owens River project has been reduced due to ongoing adjudications concerning air quality issues throughout the Owens Valley. Voters rejected the Peripheral Canal project that would have sent more water through the California Aqueduct from Northern California. Overlay the increasing Southern California population, and you have the classic economic construct for increasing prices; decreasing supply and increasing demand. Most irrigation systems are installed when buildings are constructed. As buildings age, new roofs get put on, new paint is applied, new parking lots are paved etc, but the old irrigation systems remain untouched. Most industry analysts peg irrigation efficiency at no better than 65% and this means added expenses to the owner's bottom line. If you notice the white build up on windows and parking areas, that same chemical process is going on in pipes and valves. This build up is similar to arteriosclerosis, a constriction that reduces flow.

If you look at your lawn, and find that it is all green, congratulations! However, a brief stroll through the lawn will probably reveal areas that are squishy from water, while other areas might be hard. Variations on this become even more apparent when you look at a lawn that runs from yellow (or bare) to dark green. The same applies to ground covers, and flower beds. Remember, your sprinklers were probably installed by the low bid contractor. Sometimes you will see that lawn areas in the shade operate on the same valve as those in the full sun. The sloped areas might be watered from the top and bottom. Also, a contractor can lower costs by not installing enough valves and using cheap controllers. These factors and others contribute to an inefficient irrigation system.

Many landscapers think that when plants look unhealthy the only solution is more water. Over irrigation is bad for landscaping, expensive and adds to building maintenance costs. Decks, siding, painted areas, driveways and walkways are just a few areas that get wet with sprinkler systems. The more water the quicker these areas deteriorate. Mold has become big business in California and landlords must keep their buildings dry. Guess where you find the most instances of mold....in the landscape. The hidden costs of over irrigating potentially dwarfs existing landscape water cost savings. Thankfully, modern irrigation systems can remedy these problems and provide huge savings on water bills and maintenance costs. The biggest improvement is with irrigation controllers. Today, there are controllers that are weather based. They turn off in the rain. The amount of water they apply is based more on existing conditions rather than a maintenance workers' experience, or lack thereof.

The following are some tips to consider when evaluating your building's irrigation system:

1. Walk around your building, checking the irrigation system, landscaped areas and structure for problems and potential improvements.
2. Take a look at you annual water bills and building maintenance costs. Would not recommend this since summer consumption will be much higher than winter, or should be....Remember the goal is to save money, not pull your hair out.
3. Through the implementation of various strategies, water cost savings is averaging around 30%. After annualizing your landscape water costs, factor in a 30% savings along with additional savings estimates on building maintenance to determine if an expert analysis makes sense.

4. Make sure you have a landscape conservation expert give your building an irrigation efficiency analysis. It is quick, easy and inexpensive. This step alone can save you hundreds and even thousands of dollars on your annual water bill.
5. Consider irrigation as a capitalized budget expense. Just like other fixed long term assets, these systems wear out over time. There are also improvements that will optimize the value of your properties' landscape and minimize costs.

The above article was written by Bill Kabaker of Precise Landscape. Precise Landscape specializes in saving landlords and property management company's money through water conservation and efficiency. Bill has over 30 years experience and for more information or a complementary consultation he can be reached toll free at 866-554-2925.