

Water Utility Agency Aiming to Develop Partnership with the Green Industry

Denver Water has always considered the single family residential customers the primary target for water conservation. Denver Water's marketing and advertising campaigns are especially directed towards our single family residential customers. We then began to consider our commercial irrigation users. Recently we conducted a survey with our WaterSense smart controller rebate customers to determine how they heard about the rebate program. Only 6% had heard about the rebates from their contractor. A large majority of our customers heard about the rebates from the retail stores. Other sources of successful rebate information were achieved through the advertisement in the monthly water bill as well as the DW website. This knowledge further influenced our decision to develop marketing and programmatic options to engage the Green Industry to reduce water consumption in the commercial sector.

As a utility, we recognize there is a conflicting message the Green Industry receives between Denver Water and their employer. When reservoirs are low we request and even require reduction in water use. Then, there is the customer that just wants the grass to stay green. The role of the landscape professional is to maintain green grass and to keep the plants healthy and thriving which requires water. The added difficulty is the underbidding to keep contracts as budgets are continually tightening. Labor and irrigation technician hours are often cut to meet the demand. This leaves no room within the contract to maintain the irrigation systems (let alone manage the water) while trying to make a profit.

Conservation Programs

For several years, Denver Water has designed programs to encourage improved efficiency for commercial properties irrigation systems. We have provided free water audits where we go through the entire irrigation system, zone by zone creating a report with specific site information and recommendations. We can identify locations of broken heads or lines, mixed zones, tilted or obstructed heads, etc. and print out a report immediately on site for the contractor's information and use. The report also details zone by zone recommendations for other Denver Water programs such as native grass conversion, rebates and the water budget program. Our rebates include 25% purchase price of WaterSense ET controllers (product only, no labor) and precision nozzles at \$2.00/nozzle.

As a result of the drought in 2012 we developed and piloted the Water Budget Program. It was designed for large commercial customers who had a significant amount of landscaping on their property. It is a free program and the customer just needs to sign up and provide specific site information along with the contact information for both the landscape contractor and the property or site manager. Each month a letter goes out with a graph showing the sites actual water use versus appropriate water efficient benchmark calculated by Denver Water based on irrigable area and outdoor water use. Using industry standards, 18 gallons per square foot (GPSF) per year was applied as the targeted use in a normal year. During the drought, we required a further reduction of 35% (or 12 GPSF). The program was developed to be informational and a tool for the landscape and manager to identify what the sites water use was so they can collectively determine the water use goals for the site. We also saw it as a helpful tool to identify possible breaks or spikes in consumption. The additional benefit of participating in the program is the site was exempt from any water day restrictions. However, they were still responsible to adhere to

the no daytime watering rule. If the site exceeded the monthly expectations we would notify and work with the property but there was no penalty applied.

Communications and Marketing

Denver Water's "Use Only What You Need" campaign has been an award winning campaign with catchy billboards, bus stops, and commercials as well as antics such as the running toilet (a mascot like costume that runs around events and sports venues). Although successful, it was aimed almost exclusively at our residential customers. Our marketing team is working with the conservation field team, irrigation distributors and local professional organizations to create a message directly to the landscape contractor and irrigation industry audience. We have also successfully utilized social media to target the Green Industry audience. We participated in a landscape chat talking about Xeriscape and landscape conversion. The potential reach of this chat was 137,000 impressions.

Future Partnerships

At Denver Water, our future state is to continue developing programs that will acknowledge the Green Industry and encourage continued improved irrigation efficiency. Although it is just in the conceptual phase, we are considering a recognition program for properties that are conscientiously making an effort to use less water. The sites within the Water Budget program can be ranked and labeled efficient based on much water they are using. This gives us the opportunity to highlight the good work being done by managers, landscapers, and property owners. We can also look at what the site has done overall to bring their water use down, such as landscape conversion, Xeriscape, rebates or any other ideas implemented to reduce long term water use. We anticipate awards, signage or recognition on our website as some of our ideas for recognition.

Another future initiative we are considering is creating Water Management specifications to include as an addendum to landscape maintenance contracts. As previously stated, we understand contract labor is being cut due to continually reduced budgets. The contractor cannot be responsible to cut their costs without cutting labor. Often times, the irrigation technicians scope of work is reduced to keep the contract profitable. Again, here comes the conflict whereas we are asking them to do more work in terms of Water Management while they're being paid less. We would like to develop a scope of work that includes Water Management that can be included within the contract or as an addendum. The contractor would be able to bid the extra hours required to not only manage the landscape but also the irrigation system and water use. As a third party, Denver Water can endorse Water Management and objectively support management companies to include water management within all standard maintenance contracts.

It is widely acknowledged that water is a precious and finite resource. Water management is the future of the landscaping industry and Denver Water wants to partner with and support those that are currently practicing or trying to develop water management for their customers. Improved knowledge and efficiencies must be achieved within the Green Industry for a sustainable future.

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