

Energy Conservation... it works for Everyone.

In many common-wall communities (villas, townhomes, condominiums), the Association may pay for some resident utilities like water and sometimes power and heat. Even if you don't live in a common wall community, we all use power, heat and water. The hope is that residents will use these utilities prudently and conserve them by keeping the fixtures that dispense them in optimal working condition. No so. Take water, for example: While association water bills continue to ratchet up, residents too often let dripping faucets, dripping hose bibs and trickling toilets become background noise. Did you know that 10 drips per minute wastes 526 gallons of water a year? The same principle applies to other association paid utilities. Lights are often left on when no one is home. If it is an incandescent bulb, it is really costing you!

It is basic human nature: I'm not paying (directly) for it, so who cares? This lack of concern causes resources and dollars to literally go down the drain. Is the Association helpless to control it? No. Whenever there is an association paid cost, the Board has the responsibility to monitor and control that usage. So, how is that best done?

Analyze utility usage. Looking at the last 24-36 months of utility bills can reveal much. Is usage consistent for the months in question? If the total yearly usage is divided by the number of homes by 12 months, is it consistent with utility company averages? If not, roll up your sleeves, you've got work to do. Utility bills are usually one of a community association's biggest expenses. A 5-10% reduction may translate into thousands of dollars of savings.

Perform or have performed a Utility Audit. All units should be surveyed for fixtures that control association paid utilities. The first step is to send out a checklist form with postpaid return envelope to all residents. The survey should include questions and items you need the resident to respond to. Ask questions like: Are your toilets running? Include info about how to test to see if they are running by placing several drops of blue dye in the tank and in a few minutes if it shows up in the bowl, its running.

Do faucets drip? Do you have low flow faucets? Are your shower heads dripping? Do you have low flow shower heads? Do you have a programmable thermostat or clock for your heater or AC? Are all exterior lights using compact fluorescent bulbs? These are just a few samples of questions that should be asked if the Association is paying utility bills that relate to these items.

Schedule repairs. Once you have the questionnaires back, determine what needs to be done. Approach this campaign as a way of saving a bucket load of money to deter claims of invasion of privacy. Explain in dollars and cents how reducing water consumption by 10%, 20% or even 30% could affect the monthly assessment. Since water is a major budget item, the reduction is significant.

Based on the savings, the community association can justify paying for the repairs and it is cheaper for everyone if they're done efficiently. These repairs can be done by maintenance people who charge a fraction of what plumbers charge.

Perform repairs. Pick a weekend when a repair crew can do repairs and advise resident of the schedule and the need to be home during no more than a 2 hour time frame. Using the returned Utility Audit as guides, have crews equipped with toilet tank repair kits, an assortment of faucet washers, low-flow water restrictors, 13 watt compact fluorescent bulbs, programmable clocks for heat and move quickly from house to house. The repairs shouldn't take more than 15-30 minutes per unit. At this rate, two men could do 40 homes or more in a day.

There may be several units that cannot be accessed because the owner is unavailable. Arrange another weekend to finish up. There may be a few who refuse access but with 80-90% compliance, the project is a great success. If there is evidence that a holdout's unit is leaking water (you can hear it running), it may qualify under the community association's emergency access rights.

Watt Savings.

In many associations, light bulb replacement continues like the Sorcerer's apprentice: it burns out, you replace it, it burns out, you replace it... you get the picture. When it comes to servicing exterior lighting, there are a variety of considerations such as:

- *Do the bulbs provide enough light for security and safety?
- *What does burn-out replacement cost in time and money?
- *How much do the bulbs themselves cost?
- *What is the energy cost?

Fortunately, there is a handy solution that maximizes utility while minimizing cost called compact fluorescent bulbs. They come in many sizes and shapes that fit your existing fixtures.

While CF's (compact fluorescents) are more expensive than incandescent bulbs (around \$4.00 vs \$.50) the extra long life (approximately 10,000 hours compared to 750), reduced bulb changes (less maintenance hours on changing bulbs) and brighter light, more than make up for the cost difference. Watt a difference! When it comes to conserving energy and reducing costs, it's the drips and watts that'll get you.