



Conserve Your Water, Reduce Your Utility Bill

The saying goes, “April showers bring May flowers.” And while each year we hope that the abundance of Spring rain will refresh our gardens and fill our reservoirs, we can’t always count on Mother Nature to ensure that there’s ample water for our day-to-day needs.



As a Board Member, have you considered how water conservation falls under your fiduciary umbrella? As a steward for your community, how can you preserve water and control water loss? And what are the benefits that can be reaped by doing so?

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Water conservation includes the preservation, control and development of water resources, both surface and groundwater. A study by the U.S. Forest Service published in the journal “Earth’s Future,” estimates that by 2071, nearly half of the 204 freshwater basins in the United States may not be able to meet the monthly water demand. The research points to two main causes for the projected shortages. First is population growth. Despite the average American’s use of less water, population growth will increase water demand across most of the country. Second is projected climate fluctuations. Climate fluctuations affect both rain patterns and temperatures and are expected to decrease our natural water supply in water basins, which feed our rivers and tributaries.

How are we using (and perhaps abusing) our water resources? The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that each American household uses an estimated 88 gallons of water a day (think showers, baths, toilet flushes, laundry, car washes and lawn watering.) And that doesn’t take into account the loss of water per household every week due to common leaks (180 gallons per week/per household.) Multiply those numbers by the amount of homes or units in your community and the loss can be staggering!

WHAT CAN BOARD MEMBERS DO?

Whether you oversee an HOA or a Condominium, Board Members can take some simple steps to save water in common areas:

- Drought-resistant native plants need less watering, and their deep root systems loosen soil, making it easier for water to percolate downwards. Drought-resistant trees and plants thrive without regular irrigation. Ask your landscape vendor for recommendations in planting attractive, drought-resistant

plants. You'll not only conserve water and save money on your utility bill, you'll also promote a healthy habitat for birds, bees and butterflies.

- Mulching. Make sure that planting beds and trees are generously mulched. Mulching keeps plant root systems cool and keep moisture in the soil.
- Irrigation. Have you ever driven in the rain and seen a community with their sprinklers running, or one watering areas of concrete/asphalt due to a poorly adjusted system? If you use a sprinkler system, use it sparingly – only during the coolest part of the day to prevent evaporation, and only when needed. (An easy test: Step on the grass. If it springs back up when you move your foot, it doesn't need water!) Ask your local irrigation specialist to inspect your system and recommend more efficient alternatives such as automatic rain-shutoff or a drop system. These systems can improve efficiency by as much as 40 percent and offer other benefits as well.
- Eliminate leaks. Leaks top the list when it comes to unnecessary water loss. The EPA notes that a single 1/32" diameter leak on a hose, emitter or outdoor faucet can waste more than 6,000 gallons of water per year. Ensure that your maintenance team or lawn care specialists check all exterior water sources every week, including your pool facilities, if applicable.

HELPING YOUR HOMEOWNERS TO CONSERVE

By educating your membership now on how to conserve water, Boards can help reduce the financial impact of high water and energy bills for both the community and individual owners. Greater awareness will also encourage members to promote natural plant habitats.

Use all communication tools at hand (newsletters, fliers, emails) to encourage the your membership to:

- Install low-flow showerheads, which can save up to 15 gallons of water during a 10-minute shower.
- Run dishwashers only when they are full. An automatic dishwasher uses 9-12 gallons of water per wash, while hand washing dishes can use up to 20 gallons.
- Turn the water off while brushing your teeth or shaving. Get in the habit of shutting off the water when it's not actually in use.
- Check all faucets, toilets and interior pipes for leaks. Leaks waste water 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and make up about 13% of home water usage.
- If you own an old toilet, consider retrofitting the tank by adding an item such as a brick or a plastic bottle with gravel to the tank to save water.
- Run your washing machine with a full load. An automatic washer can use more than 30 gallons of water per cycle.
- Clean your front stoop and drive the old fashioned way with a broom instead of with a hose.
- Ordering replacement appliances? Visit ENERGYSTAR.gov before you buy to make sure you are purchasing an efficient appliance.
- Don't run the hose while washing your vehicle. Use a bucket to wash your car and just enough hose water for a thorough rinse.

Taking small steps to conserve water today will not only save money for your community and your owners but will collectively make an enormous impact on the available water supply for generations to come. Your Sentry Community Manager is an excellent "resource" to help you spread the news!

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**Becky SuPrise, CMCA®, AMS®, PCAM®
Division Manager
Alexandria, VA**

Becky SuPrise is the Division Manager for Sentry's Alexandria, VA office. She has been a Community Management Professional for more than 20 years and holds professional designations of CMCA®, AMS®, and PCAM®. Becky graduated with a B.A. in Communications from George Mason University and has been with Sentry Management since 2016.

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