



New Report Released:

Drop by Drop: Seven Ways Texas Cities Can Conserve Water

What 19 cities around the state are—and are not—doing to use water wisely

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(Austin, TX) – The National Wildlife Federation and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club released a joint report today recommending seven common-sense water conservation measures. The report reviews 19 cities around the state to see where these measures are in place and concludes that, with some exceptions, most of the cities surveyed are not doing enough to make the most efficient use of existing water supplies.

The report is available at <http://www.texaswatermatters.org/dropbydrop.htm>.

“The best and cheapest source of water is the one that’s already on tap,” said Ken Kramer state director of the Sierra Club. “The key measure of success for any water conservation program is reducing water use on a per person basis and we recognize that takes time. In this report, we looked at some measures cities can be using right now to see if they are moving in the right direction. Our review makes it clear that while a handful of cities are working to maximize their water-use efficiency, most cities are doing little to use the water they have as efficiently as possible.”

Texas is the fastest growing state in the union; demographers predict the state’s population will double by mid-century.

“Our population is growing, but our water resources are essentially finite,” said Myron Hess, Manager of Texas Water Programs for the National Wildlife Federation. “We are going to need to continue to get smarter and smarter about how we use water in the 21st century. Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions water use in Texas’ cities remains far too high. There is nothing smart about failing to take advantage of these tried and true ways of increasing water-use efficiency.”

The cities included in the report are: Arlington, Austin, Beaumont, Brownsville, College Station, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Garland, Houston, Huntsville, Katy, Laredo, Lubbock, Pasadena, Plano, San Antonio, and Tyler. The cities represent a diversity of population size, water sources, and geographic location; but they share one thing in common: all were required to submit new or revised water conservation plans to the State of Texas in 2009. Those plans, augmented by additional research, provided a major source of information for the new report.

The report describes and recommends seven efficiency measures that have a proven track report at reducing water use. The cities surveyed were rated on several of those measures. The measures include:



Water Pricing Structure: The report recommends a strongly tiered rate structure with affordable prices for those who use water efficiently and effectively higher water rates for customers who use excessive amounts of water. Austin was the only city whose residential use pricing structure earned a “Strong” rating, while Beaumont, Lubbock and Plano all had rate structures that, when assessed as an effective rate, offered significant discounts for high users, thereby encouraging wasteful water use.

Water Savings Goals: Texas cities are required to create conservation plans with five- and ten-year water use reduction goals, however many cities set easily-achievable but not very impressive targets. Dallas, for example, had the highest rate of per capita water use in our review and committed to just a modest reduction. On the other hand, San Antonio—which has already achieved impressive reductions in per capita water use—committed to continued reductions.

Toilet Replacement: New high-efficiency toilets can save 12,000 gallons annually over older models, but only six cities in the review had active programs encouraging the replacement of inefficient toilets.

Conservation Funding: Most of Texas’s biggest cities now have reasonably well-funded conservation departments. The city of Houston was the only major city in the state without a conservation department or any significant specific funding for conservation.

Outdoor Watering: In Texas, a significant amount of treated drinking water is used for watering lawns. The Texas Water Development Board estimates that over half this water is wasted due to overwatering or run-off. Only two cities in our survey—El Paso and Austin—had “Strong” outdoor watering ordinances while ten cities placed no restrictions at all on outdoor watering.

The report notes that one caveat to the review of water conservation plans is that the programs and components of these plans must be implemented, and implemented effectively. “Water suppliers required to submit water conservation plans to the State will now have to submit annual reports on how they are doing in carrying out their plans and meeting their water savings targets, and the first reports are due May 1 of this year,” noted the Sierra Club’s Kramer. “Texans need to take a close look at how their city water suppliers are doing in achieving more efficient use of water supplies. We shouldn’t be spending huge amounts of ratepayer and taxpayer money for new water supplies if existing supplies are not being used efficiently.”

Get a copy of the report at <http://www.texaswatermatters.org/dropbydrop.htm>.

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