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photo by Chris Fritchie



Are You Water Wise? Water Restriction Basics

By Debbie Vallejo

TURN ON THE TAP and the water pours out, flush the commode and everything is swept away into oblivion, set the automatic sprinkler and the lawn is miraculously watered. Many North Texas citizens didn't give the basics of water conservation a second thought, let alone a first one, until reality struck last year and the North Texas Municipal Water District tightened up on restrictions for water use in its member cities. Nothing like the impact of a drought to bring the otherwise

taken-for-granted water supply up front in daily conversations around the water cooler, no pun intended.

The North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD) services more than 1.5 million people in six North Texas counties. There are thirteen member cities, including Frisco, providing representation on the NTMWD Board of Directors. The board provides oversight for the organization, management and development of water supply facilities and use in the areas the district serves.

The municipal district derives its water supply from three reservoirs; Lake Lavon, Lake Jim Chapman and Lake Texoma. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) owns, operates and oversees the use of all three lakes. Lake Ray Hubbard, an area lake northwest of Frisco, does not contribute to the water supply for member cities, but does receive water during flood releases from Lake Lavon. The last time the floodgates were opened sending water from Lake Lavon to Lake Ray Hubbard was in April of 2005. Lake Ray Hubbard is owned by the city of Dallas and has not seen the same decrease in its water level that has plagued Lake Lavon over the past year. The main reason for the difference is a single rain event occurring in March of 2006 where Ray Hubbard received nine inches of rainfall, while Lavon received a little less than two.

In June of 2006 the NTMWD initiated "Stage 3" of their Water Conservation and Drought Contingency Plan. Although cities are allowed to make moderate modifications to the restrictions based on individual community needs, most of the requirements from city to city look the same. Stage 3 watering restrictions limit the use of water by prohibiting outdoor watering during the hottest parts of the day and limiting frequency to one day a week. Soaker hoses, drip systems and hand-held hoses are allowed to water plants, flowers, vegetable gardens and shrubs, and for foundation maintenance as necessary. A water fountain, washing cars and water use resulting in runoff into the streets or sidewalks is prohibited, although current Stage 3 modifications in Frisco allow for washing vehicles.

WHY RESTRICT THE WATER SUPPLY?

During the 2006 winter months Frisco citizens utilized approximately 150 gallons of water per person per day. During the summer of that same year water use increased to 600 gallons per person per day. Gary Hartwell is the director of Public Works for Frisco. "The difference in use from winter to summer is going on



the yards,” explains Mr. Hartwell. “That amount of water is way too much and unnecessary even for summer use.”

One argument against water restrictions is that residents tend to over-water on their allotted day, therefore using more water on a weekly basis instead of less. Mr. Hartwell disagrees. “People over-water even when they are watering two or three days a week,” he says. “We are using less water because there is less opportunity for waste.” Water use in Frisco has, in fact, improved significantly since the beginning of Stage 3 water restrictions in June of 2006. “From June 2006 to December of 2006 we saved 1.6 billion gallons of water on Stage 3 restrictions,” explains Mr. Hartwell. “From January through March of this year we have utilized 278 million gallons less water than during the same time last year, and that is with all the additional growth.”

Some may question the wisdom of continual residential growth in an area where water use is a concern. Mr. Hartwell, however, says the issue is not the growth of the city, but more the excessive use of automatic sprinkler systems. “The city has a growth plan through the year 2060, which includes appropriate means for handling the water supply,” says Mr. Hartwell. “A city does not thrive without growth. We just

want to make sure we don’t waste water, but instead use it wisely.” A leaky faucet, for example, can waste as much as 20 gallons of water per day.

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HOW MUCH TO WATER?

The city of Frisco recommends watering landscaping by hand as much as possible, or running sprinklers on manual mode. “The easiest way to prevent over-watering is to run sprinklers on manual mode. Run the system through all zones, three times, at no more than five or six minutes per zone,” suggests Mr. Hartwell. He explains how watering any longer is counterproductive, “The clay soil here cannot absorb water very fast, so after about five or six minutes of watering the soil is no longer absorbing the water and the water will run off into the street.” It is also important to water no more than

once a day, even with watering only one day a week.

Another disadvantage to automatic sprinkler systems is that owners often forget to turn them off on days when enough rainfall has accumulated to adequately take care of landscape needs. Operating systems manually forces owners to start the sprinklers themselves and minimizes over-watering. Running sprinklers during rainfall is actually a violation of the drought restrictions.

WHAT ARE CURRENT WATER RESTRICTIONS?

Frisco will continue with Stage 3 mandatory water restrictions for all residents. Outdoor watering is prohibited between the hours of 5 - 8 a.m. and from 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Watering is allowed one day a week on trash pick up day, although soaker and hand-held hoses may be used for trees, flowers and shrubs up to one hour on any day and for foundations as necessary. There is also a 30-day exemption for new sod and landscaping. Washing a car is permitted, but use should allow for minimum runoff. In fact, any water use that causes water runoff or waste is deemed a violation of the restrictions.

Violating water restrictions can be an expensive proposition. First-time



photos by Chris Fritchie

violators will have their sprinkler system water supply turned off and are required to pay \$25 to have it turned back on. One-time offenders do not receive citations. "Citations go only to repeat offenders obviously watering intentionally," says Mr. Hartwell. "The third violation is \$75 plus a citation issued by the city." The city fine can reach up to \$2,000 per day of misuse.

HOW MUCH LONGER?

According to Mr. Hartwell, Frisco will never again return to the laid-back attitude of yesteryear when residents watered landscaping and flowers to their hearts' content. "Now we understand how detrimental to the water supply automatic sprinklers can be. We will always be in water conservation mode. This is not just about Frisco or the North Texas Municipal Water District, this is about a water conservation plan for all of Texas."

Using water responsibly is obviously going to be an issue for North Texas for years to come. For more information on Frisco water restrictions and how all Frisconians can help conserve water, visit the city of Frisco website at www.friscotexas.gov.

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