

2.4 User Education and Facility Outreach



Overview

Educating building occupants on using water efficiently at work is essential to any organization's water conservation efforts. This is especially true when new water-efficient technologies or methods are being implemented. Installing a retrofit device or replacing outdated technology or fixtures alone might not necessarily produce expected water savings. Operation and maintenance procedures, retrofits, and replacements are most effective when employees, contractors, and visitors all understand their role in using them properly. It is also important to offer building occupants simple, straightforward ways in which they can help reduce a facility's water use, along with good reasons for doing so. User education is a cost-effective way to enhance your facility's water-efficiency efforts—even small changes in user behavior can result in significant water savings.

Best Practices

To improve water efficiency outside and within a facility, there are a number of best practices to educate employees and other building occupants on water savings to promote success.

Employee and Occupant Education

Consider the following approaches when educating employees and building occupants on your water-efficiency initiative:

- Share management's commitment to water efficiency and the company's water management program through staff meetings, posters, emails, newsletters, and other communications. Include specifics on water-efficiency goals whenever possible.
- Graph and post monthly water use figures so that building occupants can stay informed about the facility's progress and become invested in water-efficiency efforts.
- Create point-of-use reminders to reinforce positive behaviors (e.g., place instructions next to dual-flush toilets).
- Include water-efficiency messages in facility-wide events, such as fairs, open houses, or Earth Day events.
- Train maintenance personnel, operators, and supervisors on any new or revised procedures involving water efficiency. Encourage relevant custodial, cleaning, and maintenance personnel, as well as everyday users, to identify and report leaks in accordance with *Section 2.3: Leak Detection and Repair*. Make it easy to report problems by setting up a user-friendly communication system such as a hotline. Be sure to repair leaks promptly.

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Making Water Efficiency Fun

Following are some creative ways to get employees involved in recognizing the importance of water efficiency at work:

- Consider creating a “Green Team” responsible for environmental issues in and around the facility.
- Hold events related to water efficiency within the facility periodically throughout the year to educate building occupants and celebrate successes. Earth Day and Fix a Leak Week, which is sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) WaterSense® program, are good opportunities to bring attention to water efficiency.¹⁷
- Consider holding a contest to encourage water use reductions among building occupants. Acknowledge those who identify successful projects or provide group awards for major successes.
- Start a suggestion and incentive system to recognize and encourage water savings in the facility. For best results, include a mechanism to acknowledge submissions and provide information on how they were addressed.
- Provide incentives to building occupants to promote water-saving success. Consider rewarding guests for participating in towel and linen reuse programs at hotels or employees for meeting challenges to reduce building water use.

Providing Water-Efficiency Tips

Periodically remind building occupants and employees of common tips they can follow to help reduce water use, including some of the following, where relevant:

- Fill the sink and turn off the tap when washing dishes in community kitchen areas.
- When using the dishwasher, wash only full loads.
- Look for and report leaky bathroom and kitchen fixtures, or any other leaks, to the appropriate personnel.
- Sweep instead of rinsing off sidewalks, kitchen floors, or other areas.
- Report irrigation occurrences during less efficient times, including during the middle of the day or when it is raining.
- Report broken or improperly positioned irrigation sprinkler heads that spray water on sidewalks or pavement.
- To help building occupants learn more about how they can be water-efficient at work or at home, direct them to the EPA’s WaterSense website¹⁸ for more information.

¹⁷ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) WaterSense program. Fix a Leak Week. www.epa.gov/watersense/our_water/fix_a_leak.html.

¹⁸ EPA’s WaterSense program. www.epa.gov/watersense.

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Outreach to Visitors and Audiences Outside the Facility

Consider the following when looking to broaden the outreach of your facility's water-efficiency efforts:

- Work with local utilities to participate in their commercial and institutional water conservation programs and to share success stories with other facilities.
- Create displays presenting facility water savings for the facility lobby and other public reception areas.
- Use signage, brochures, and other promotional materials to inform visitors, customers, and others about the facility's water-efficiency program and actions people can take in restrooms or other areas to save water.



Example signage at an EPA Gulf Ecology Division (GED) facility

Additional Resources

Alliance for Water Efficiency. Water Savings Tips: Commercial, Industrial, and Institutional Water Use. www.allianceforwaterefficiency.org/CII-tips.aspx.

Schultz Communications. July 1999. *A Water Conservation Guide for Commercial, Institutional and Industrial Users*. Prepared for the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer. www.ose.state.nm.us/wucp_ici.html.

State of California, Department of Water Resources. October 1994. *Water Efficiency Guide for Business Managers and Facility Engineers*. www.water.ca.gov/wateruseefficiency.