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HIGHEST RESIDENTIAL USERS PROJECT: FOCUS ON IRRIGATION

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BACKGROUND

- In 1995, the city of Albuquerque established a ten year goal of a 30% reduction in per capita consumption
- Conservation efforts focused primarily on indoor use, and the 30% goal was met
- In 2003, the water utility decided to put more emphasis on outdoor use

Residential Irrigation: Opportunity for Savings

Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (WUA)
has found that:

- 70% of all use is residential
- 40% of residential use is irrigation (9.2 billion gals/yr)
- Estimates of water need compared to water use varies considerably by neighborhood
- Audits and community wide water use reductions have shown that residents respond positively to information, rebates and instruction in watering efficiently

Residential Irrigation Programs Initiated

In 2007, the WUA launched a series of programs to reduce residential irrigation use

- Rebates for upgrading controllers, sprinkler heads, turf reduction, mulch and rain water harvesting
- Lawn Watering Classes offered all summer with a \$20 rebate for attendance
- Classes also offered on Xeriscape and Drip Systems
- Web Based Lawn Watering Schedule Generator was established in March of 2008

Pilot Program Targeted to High Use Single Family Homes

In addition to the rebates and training offered to all customers, the WUA decided to target customers with the greatest potential savings opportunities

In 2007, the WUA initiated a pilot project to target neighborhoods known to have higher than average water use, primarily due to large turf landscapes

Two neighborhoods were chosen for the pilot ... and in addition, the pilot program included the very highest single family residential users, regardless of address

Purpose of the Pilot Project

Reduce seasonal water use for targeted customers by:

Providing information to residents about their irrigation water needs versus their irrigation water use

Providing benchmarks related to their specific neighborhood and to the community as a whole (residential average use)

Suggesting specific ways to conserve

Offering additional assistance at no cost

TANOAN NEIGHBORHOOD

- Contains about 1200 homes built between the late 1970's and 1990's with large lots
- 400 homes were included in our sample
- Tanoan is a gated community with “turf covenants” requiring turf in all front yards
- Common areas are also primarily turf
- Community has a country club and golf course
- Average annual water use is **286,000** gals/yr versus the residential average of 102,000 gals/yr

COUNTRY CLUB NEIGHBORHOOD

- An old neighborhood downtown of about 300 homes with much larger than average lots
- All 300 were included in the sample
- Community has a country club and golf course
- Average use is **178,000** gals/yr versus the residential average of 102,000 gals/yr

TOP 100 RESIDENTIAL USERS

- Highest users were selected from the WUA database
- About 100 accounts were included in the sample
- Residents were scattered across the city, although 26% were in Tanoan and 20% were in Four Hills, another country club/golf course community
- The average usage for the highest residential users is **743,168** versus the residential average of 102,000

METHODOLOGY

- Neighborhoods were chosen
- Parcel maps created for each address to show boundaries
- Aerial photos printed for each address
- Site drive by to compare aerial to actual landscape to the extent visible from the street
- Using aerials and software, map irrigated area of each site to determine square footage by plant type
- Water history graph created for each site
- Draft report developed, reviewed, and mailed

PUBLIC RELATIONS CONCERNS

Initial plan was to send customer:

Cover letter and report with detailed site information including

aerial photograph showing irrigated areas by plant type

Concerns arose when news media misrepresented the project and there were other unrelated PR events/issues occurring

In response the Water Utility decided to balance the reports to provide some information , but not so much as to appear invasive. The letter and reports provided more general information and aerial photos were not included.

PUBLIC REACTION

- Virtually no public reaction to the reports – essentially no controversy
- No media reports or response
- Only one resident who didn't believe their report was accurate
- Only a handful of irrigation audits were requested – these residents thanked us for the reports – thought they were useful – wanted to save water

CONTACT INFORMATION

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