

Conservation begins at home – that is, with your city or RWD

By the time you read this article, we may be in the midst of a favorably moist summer across the state of Kansas. The current conditions and the long-range forecasts would make one with any appreciation of our weather trends feel that is less than likely. While some areas of Kansas and the Midwest have received beneficial rains earlier this spring, Kansas as a whole continues to be mostly drier than normal. In many areas, it has been abnormally dry.

Those of us in the public water supply industry are quite aware of the problems that confront our communities during times of drought conditions. Our challenge is to be prepared with measures that can ease the pain that comes with

running short of water, either from a lack of supply or the inability of the system to meet demands due to limited infrastructure. Preparations can prove woefully inadequate if we have waited until the time of the emergency to begin to develop and implement those important plans.

A well-conceived drought emergency plan is necessary to ensure that a water district or city or other public water supply is able to maintain at least minimal service to at least the most critical water needs of consumers and community. KRWA can provide technical assistance to systems to help prepare that very important Drought Emergency Plan.



*Dennis Schwartz
KRWA President*

However, an equally important program that all systems should have in place, practice and promote on a continuing basis is a Water Conservation Plan. Many water systems in Kansas have conservation plans in place now due to the requirements of their

other programs that require the participants to have a conservation plan.

Adopt a conservation ethic

An effective conservation plan is one that is truly active – not one that simply sits on a shelf because it

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participation in the state's Water Marketing Program, the Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Fund, the Water Assurance Program or

was something that the city or RWD "had" to do because the entity desired to participate in some state funding or water purchase



Watering the driveway and sidewalk puts water down a storm drain. This is not a strategy to be found in a Water Conservation Plan.

program. To be effective in our conservation efforts, we must adopt a sincere "conservation ethic." Many of us have heard time and time again of systems that are concerned that they aren't "selling" as much water as they would like.

I would like to suggest that we all keep the operation of a water utility in perspective. While it's important to focus on the "business side" of the operation, providing water service to citizens is essential to protect the public health and to promote public welfare and safety. Providing water service is more than just "selling water." Water systems do of course need an appropriate method to charge for the production and delivery of water – and it is not inappropriate to charge for those services on the basis of the amount of water that a consumer takes from the system. How a water utility chooses to charge for water service can have much to do with furthering the objectives of an effective water conservation plan. Declining block rate structures, where the more you use the less it costs, certainly will not promote conservation. A much better option is a level rate structure. It may be appropriate to consider an increasing block rate schedule to discourage excess use where supplies are especially limited.

Local authority?

Does your system possess the authority to prevent wasteful water practices? For example, can you require that automatic irrigation systems not operate during rainfall events or apply water to paved areas that results in water running into storm drains? Does the planning agency encourage landscape plans that make wise use of locally acclimated and low water consumption plant materials? What percent of the system's water production or purchase is lost and/or unaccounted for? Anything in excess of 15 percent is generally considered to be unacceptable.

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Systems need to address water loss issues. They need to accurately determine the cause of their losses, and then hopefully correct the problems.

There are many things that water systems can do to promote water conservation. Here are some examples:



Landscaping to conserve water use can be accomplished by using native plants like the yellow long-headed coneflowers shown here.



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1. Make low-flow showerheads available to water consumers at low or no cost; these can save both water and energy. Buy one and try it – KRWA sells these at wholesale costs with a 10-year guarantee.

Wise water use

State policy regarding water conservation is guided by the principal that the privilege to use water carries with it the responsibility to use the water

water is available for the beneficial uses of the people of the state. It is a tool to help meet the demands a society places on a critically important and a finite resource, that being water. If a system needs help



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2. Landscape office or water plant facilities with water conserving native plant species to both demonstrate water-conserving practices for users and also to reduce maintenance costs.

3. Suggest water conservation practices to users through publications and news releases. Look for opportunities to speak to local groups about the importance of water conservation.

wisely. Water conservation policy is also shaped by a philosophy of “sharing the shortage” among those using a water source before regulations will be imposed and by the desire to meet drought or other emergency conditions in a proactive manner.

Water conservation is essential for the effective management of water resources in Kansas and to ensure that a sufficient supply of

Rural scenes that become familiar during times of a prolonged drought were recorded recently in south-central Nebraska.

Left: Heat, wind, with no moisture or ground cover has dried and loosened topsoil allowing it to take off with the wind.

Center: Cattle that should be grazing the pasture grass are being fed expensive alfalfa hay. Water is often hauled to cattle because natural tanks and springs are dry.

Above right: Animals drinking from this puddle in the Little Blue River will soon need another water source as the river is on the way to completely drying up near this farm.

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in developing a water conservation plan or desires to have master meters tested or would like a water loss survey conducted, I encourage you to take advantage of the services of KRWA. On-site assistance is available because of the partnerships KRWA has with state and federal agencies. The Kansas Water Plan provides funding on-site assistance to public water systems through KRWA. KDHE has supplemented this program in FY ‘05 and ‘06. I encourage you to call KRWA at 785/336-3760 if you are interested in developing or implementing a water conservation plan, testing master meters, conducting a water loss survey or reviewing rates.