Water Conservation: Resources for Fort Bend MUD 155 Residents

Though summertime is waning, it is still hot outside! Water conservation is always important; however, it is especially crucial during seasonal scorching heat. What can Fort Bend County MUD 155 residents do? Learn about and practice methods to help save water.

According to TakeCareOfTexas.org, some excellent tips for conserving water are:

- Water lawns efficiently
- Collect rainwater for landscape use
- Install water efficient showerheads, toilets, faucets, and faucet aerators
- Fix household leaks
- Use a basin of soapy water to hand- wash dishes instead of letting the faucet run
- Invest in an ENERGY STAR-qualified dishwasher
- Turn off the tap when brushing teeth
- Invest in an ENERGY STAR-qualified clothes washer
- Install a smart sprinkler irrigation controller

Proper maintenance of household plumbing equipment can help reduce the overuse of water and aid in lowering water bills. Regularly check hose bibs and faucets for leaks and repair as needed. Ensure that toilet flapper valves are in working order and toilets are not consistently running water. If a toilet is running, the flapper valve may need to be replaced. If a water leak in the home is suspected, turn off all water faucets and spigots, and observe the water meter. If the meter is running, there may be a leak in need of repair.

Want to dive a little deeper? Take a look at the information below!

Household Water Consumption

- Common households consume a significant amount of water. A typical bath may consume between 30-40 gallons, while the average toilet uses about 5 gallons of water per flush. Other estimated household use averages in America include:

- Approximately 20 to 40 gallons of water for one shower.

- Washing machines use an average of 25 gallons per load.
- The kitchen sink takes roughly 20 gallons per day for preparing food and washing dishes.
- The bathroom sink, used for washing hands, shaving, and brushing teeth, requires about 15 gallons per day.

Other significant water consumptions come from the watering of lawns/gardens, washing cars, and maintaining water levels in pools/fountains.

Investigating Water Leaks

Toilet Test

- The largest use of household water is to **flush the toilet**, followed by taking showers and baths. Toilets account for nearly 30 percent of an average home's indoor water consumption. Older, inefficient toilets can use as much as three to six gallons per flush.
- A leaky toilet can waste 200 gallons of water per day—that's 73,000 gallons a year. While some leaks are audible with a toilet that is often "running," some leaks may be harder to spot – but there are simple ways to detect these:
  - Remove the toilet tank lid.
  - Place a drop of food coloring in the toilet tank.
  - Replace the lid—do not flush—and wait 10 to 15 minutes.
  - If dye appears in the toilet bowl, you have a leak that can most likely be fixed by replacing a worn toilet flapper—the rubber stopper at the bottom of the tank also known as a valve seal. These rubber parts can build up materials or decay over time and are inexpensive to replace.
  - Once the test is complete, flush immediately to avoid staining the tank.
  - Tip: Replacement toilet flappers can be found at virtually any home/hardware store and are inexpensive. There are different styles that may or may not be compatible with your toilet, so be sure to bring the old flapper to the store for comparison or check the owner's manual or the manufacturer's website for the flapper part number. In many cases, simply having a photo of the old flapper on your smartphone will suffice.
  - For more information about fixing leaks, visit the EPA's **WaterSense website** or their **Fix a Leak Week page**.

Excess Moisture

If a fitting on a supply line under your sink breaks and a spray of water comes shooting out, you know immediately where the trouble is, but some leaks can be harder to spot and remain unnoticed until significant damage has already occurred. Be on the lookout for the following:

- **Wall discoloration.** This could indicate water leaking from behind the drywall and soaking through to the front side. Water stains on ceilings and walls are usually yellowish or brownish in color.

- **Bubbling paint or bulging wallpaper -** indicate that the wallboard is wet and no longer adhering tightly. In some cases, you may also notice a bulge in the wallboard, which indicates the water damage is more extensive and the wallboard will have to be replaced.

- **Dripping Sounds -** while some leaks are totally silent—for instance, if water is traveling along a wall stud—other leaks can sometimes be heard, giving you a clue as to the leak's location.

- **Musty Smells -** over time, a persistent leak provides the perfect humid environment for mold to grow. In some cases, you may notice black splotches on the outside of the wall, but often, mold will grow inside the wall where you can't see it, so a musty smell is a red flag.

- Check the cabinets under the kitchen, laundry, and bathroom sinks to make sure they're dry. You'll also want to look for puddles around the bases of tubs, toilets, and showers and beneath the water heater, dishwasher, and clothes washer. If you find any puddles, turn off the water supply valve to that appliance or fixture and call a plumber.

- Exterior - if an area in your yard is much greener (and grows faster) than the rest of the grass, it could indicate the spot where a buried water line is leaking. If the leak is profuse, you might even see some puddles on the surface of the ground.

Excess Consumption

Monthly water bills are fairly predictable, so if you receive one that's unusually high—and you haven't been using excess water—you may have a leak. The EPA suggests that a family of four will typically use no more than 12,000 gallons per month, except perhaps during the summer if you **Watch the Water Meter:**

- If you suspect a leak, monitoring your home's water meter will give you a definitive answer. The meter is located beneath a manhole-type cover near the street. Follow these steps to monitor the meter:

  - Turn off all water faucets in your home and make sure the washing machine and dishwasher are not running.

  - Check the water meter and make a note of the numbers you see. Come back in an hour and check again. If the numbers have changed, there's a leak somewhere.

  - To determine if the water leak is in the house or outdoors turn off the shut-off valve on your home's main water supply pipe. This is located where the water pipe enters the home.

  - Check the water meter, write down the numbers, and wait another hour. When you check again, if the numbers have not changed, the water leak is inside your home. If the numbers have changed, the leak is in the buried water line that runs to the house.

  - All of the above are signs of a leak, but keep in mind that not all water leaks are plumbing leaks. The water could also be coming from a leak in the roof or around a window. Either way, leaks should be addressed promptly to reduce the risk of water damage.

Leak Detectors

Some fixtures and pipes are more prone to leaking than others. An older water heater can develop pinholes along its bottom due to corrosion inside the tank, and water pipes that lead to exterior water faucets can freeze and burst during cold winters. So, you may decide to install leak detectors that can

easily be found on Amazon or home/hardware stores. These detectors emit a loud alarm when even a small amount of water is detected, so you'll be able to turn off the water supply and have the leak fixed before water wreaks havoc in your home.

Additional resources for water conservation tips:

Fort Bend County Master Gardeners "Water Your Landscape the Right Way!"
Texas Water Development Board "Water Conservation"
Texas Living Waters Project "We. Must. Conserve. Water."

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