

## Use Water Wisely Program

Now in its fifth year, the award-winning Use Water Wisely program helps Milwaukee Water Works customers find and repair water leaks to reduce water waste, control water costs, and to protect the water resource and the environment. In collaboration with Clean Wisconsin, the Milwaukee Water Works implemented the program in 2010 to effectively change consumer behavior to reduce wasted water and lower customers' personal water costs.

We are exploring outreach opportunities beyond consumer in-home, point-of-use activities to include outdoor water usage such as gardens, landscaping, and tree planting. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District provides a rain barrel program.

### Positive Results

Of customers who received materials and counseling and returned a feedback card in 2014:

- 76% said they used the leak-detecting dye tabs
- 33% said they found and fixed water leaks in their homes
- 46% fixed a leaking toilet; 31% fixed a leaking faucet; 15% fixed a leaking garden hose or hookup. Only a small percentage of leaks were reported at shower heads and water heaters.
- 96% of the customers said they found the Use Water Wisely information useful.

### Materials

- Brochure: "Use Water Wisely, Control Water Costs" encourages consumers to familiarize themselves with their home water system including the water meter, and to find and fix leaks on a routine basis. A resources list includes information about EPA's WaterSense program and Energy Star® Labels. Available in English and Spanish, the brochure is found at the Use Water Wisely section of the utility website, [www.Milwaukee.gov/water](http://www.Milwaukee.gov/water). Clean Wisconsin is identified as our partner and "Clean Wisconsin is an environmental advocacy organization which protects Wisconsin's clean water and air and advocates for clean energy."
- Dye tab packet: two non-toxic dye tablets are used to test toilets for leaks
- Postage-paid Customer Feedback card
- Use Water Wisely envelope ("Here is information to help you find and fix household water leaks" to package the brochure, dye tabs, and feedback card
- Informational card: Sized to fit in brochure racks and business size envelopes, the card advises that "Up to 14% of the water we pay for at home lakes down the drain" and includes instructions for testing toilets for leaks. A dye tab packet is stapled to the card.
- Use Water Wisely website stand-alone section at [www.milwaukee.gov/water](http://www.milwaukee.gov/water)
- Insert in Municipal Services Bill reached residential and smaller commercial customers.

## Outreach Activities

- From billing data, Customer Service employees identify customers with unusually high water use and advise them on how to find and fix leaks, and mail them the Use Water Wisely package. Toilet leaks continue to be the most common culprit of higher water usage and higher-than-normal bills. From April 2013 to April 2014, Customer Service staff mailed over 150 leak detection packages to customers who had high water use. Work orders were established to track customer contacts about high water use.
- Over 24,000 customers each year visit the Customer Service Center where they can find Use Water Wisely and Fix A Leak materials. Children who visit receive a sheet of American Water Works Association stickers depicting animals and fish who advocate wise use of water and looking for water leaks.
- Meter Services meter readers and technicians distribute the Use Water Wisely package as they investigate high water use cases, approximately 100 per month. The Milwaukee Water Works is in a multi-year program to replace over 156,000 water meters in homes and small businesses in Milwaukee and Greenfield, Hales Corners, St. Francis, and West Milwaukee. The current meters are reaching the end of their useful life, and new meters will ensure accurate reads. The program also allows the water utility access to check that meters are not leaking. A letter detailing meter replacement is mailed in advance of the meter exchange appointments, and it includes the Use Water Wisely brochure. Meter technicians also offer the Use Water Wisely packages as they make their calls. To date in 2014, Meter Techs have delivered over 13,000 brochures.
- A public education campaign incorporated in the Use Water Wisely program on a seasonal, warm weather basis targets the illegal opening of hydrants. The installation of hydrant-locking devices and public outreach effectively reduced wasted water from illegal hydrant openings from 447 million gallons (745 hydrants) in 2006 to 54 million gallons (91 hydrants) in 2013.
- A second seasonal outreach covers the coldest months of the year, when frozen services and meters not only require repair, but have the potential to waste hundreds of thousands of gallons of water in homes and businesses. Each November/December, the utility issues an informational advisory to the news media and offers on-site interviews and demonstrations showing how consumers can prevent their pipes and meters from freezing. A brochure about prevention and thawing is available in English and Spanish, and is distributed to city health community centers and the public libraries.
- Owner's Leak activities: Utility employees receive information about owner's leaks from Distribution, Customer Service, or direct calls from customers, and provide Use Water Wisely packages when meeting with customers.
- City of Milwaukee Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS) Permit Center employees distribute the brochure to property owners and plumbers as they apply for permits to perform plumbing work. Plumbing Inspectors distribute the brochure as they inspect work performed in the field. The packages with dye tabs are distributed at DNS landlord training programs.
- The Use Water Wisely packages are distributed to the resident housing councils of the Housing Authority City of Milwaukee residential developments, and supplies of dye tabs are provided to maintenance staff.

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Fix a Leak Week each March provides the opportunity to expand on national publicity reminding customers to check their household fixtures for leaks. Posters and Fix a Leak worksheets (EPA template customized for the Milwaukee Water Works) are distributed throughout the City Hall complex, including the City Permit Center and the utility's Customer Service Center. Since 2011, the Milwaukee Water Works has teamed with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District for tag-team presentations in public school classrooms, providing the Use Water Wisely informational card with dye tabs. The 2014 program featured a poster and essay contest with the theme, "Use Water Wisely."

## **Additional Community Outreach**

Use Water Wisely packages are available:

- Fourteen Milwaukee Public Library branches
- Three Milwaukee Health Department community health centers
- Elected officials for distribution at town hall meetings and on request
- A variety of public events and venues as appropriate. A targeted approach for landlords and neighborhood associations takes place in spring as various agencies sponsor home ownership and landlord training events. Most recently, Use Water Wisely packages were presented at home ownership fairs sponsored by the City of Milwaukee, Take Root Milwaukee, and the South Side Organizing Committee. We distributed Use Water Wisely brochures to building maintenance and health care professionals who attended an April 9 Milwaukee Health Department seminar on preventing Legionella-related disease in water cooling and ventilations systems.

## **A Program Worth Repeating**

Use Water Wisely was honored with the Utility Special Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Water Association in 2011. WWA Board Chair Kevin Richardson commended the Milwaukee Water Works "for its stewardship of the water resource while advocating for efficient use of water, reducing water waste, and helping consumers get the best value for the water they use with the Use Water Wisely program." One of the criteria for the award is that a utility must work with the public to effectively resolve a specific issue, and that the program can be used by other water utilities.