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Practical ways to be water wise

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Water is in short supply for many cities, farms and businesses across California and will remain so for the foreseeable future. In San Mateo County, water customers are being asked to continue efforts to voluntarily reduce their water use by 10 percent as we experience our third dry year. Reducing water use in the home is an easy way to meet this 10 percent voluntary reduction target and can save you money on your water, and possibly energy and sewer bills as well.

What are some simple steps to take? Let's start outside. If you live in a typical single-family home, approximately 40 percent of your total water use may be for irrigation of your lawn and landscaping.

The simplest ways to save water outdoors are to check your irrigation system for leaks and to reduce your irrigation time. Limiting irrigation times to early-morning hours also uses less water.

For greater savings, change some or all of your landscaping to drought-tolerant and native plants. "Water Wise Gardening in the Bay Area" is a very useful online tool available at www.bawsca.org. This tool shows examples of beautiful and colorful water-efficient gardens and has interactive features that enable the residential customer to find attractive alternatives to current plants and lawns. The tool features more than 1,200 plants and contains more than 850 color photographs of the plants, shrubs, native California plants, ground cover, perennials and ornamental grasses that provide attractive properties and landscapes. The interactive features of the tool will enable you to find attractive alternatives to your current plants and lawns that will work best in your yard.

There are many things you can do inside your home as well. Indoor activities such as showering, washing and flushing toilets typically account for more than half of all water used inside the home. Since indoor water usage is largely the same year-round, minimal indoor water-saving habit changes, like turning the water off when brushing your teeth or running the dishwasher or washing machine with a full load can have a large cumulative effect on your household's water use.

To save even more, replace your old appliances with new, efficient WaterSense or EnergyStar appliances, which save both water and energy. Toilets are the single largest user of water in the home and account for about 26 percent of typical residential water use. The replacement of your old, non-efficient toilet with a high-efficiency toilet can save you a whopping 45 gallons per day, and you may be eligible to receive a \$150 rebate.

BAWSCA and the water suppliers in San Mateo County offer a variety of water conservation programs and rebates aimed at helping residents save water and money. Go to www.bawsca.org to learn more about available water conservation programs in your area including:

- 1). In-Home Water Use Surveys;
- 2). High-Efficiency Toilet rebates of up to \$150;
- 3). Rebates of up to \$200 for High-Efficiency Washing Machines;
- 4). Free Water-Savings Fixtures (e.g., showerheads, faucet aerators, toilet flappers, hose spray-nozzles);
- 5). Water-wise landscape gardening classes. Web site links for the water suppliers in San Mateo County can also be found at www.bawsca.org.

Conservation is critically important to maintaining and extending our water supply. Your efforts to save water today can make a difference. Rethinking the way you use water — both indoors and outdoors — will

help stretch limited supplies and ensure water is there when we need it.

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