

The San Antonio Conservation Story

In 1982 San Antonio had a municipal water use rate of 225 gallons per person per day. But a committed effort to reduce that rate has been tremendously successful—current water use is about 140 gallons per person per day.

So how did San Antonio do it? The water supplier, San Antonio Water Systems, developed and implemented a water conservation campaign. This included many incentive programs to encourage residents and businesses to conserve.

Through an innovative voucher program, almost half of the city's older, water-guzzling toilets have been replaced with new, more water efficient models. Rebates are offered for purchasing water efficient clothes washers, shower heads, rain sensors for irrigation systems and more. Leaks are repaired at no cost for low income customers. SAWS encourages the use of native, drought tolerant plants in landscaping and smarter lawn watering, which in the summer accounts for about half of residential water use.

The water utility also has a strongly tiered rate structure, so heavy users pay more which encourages them to use less. Aging and leaky water supply pipes have been replaced. Commercial programs assist businesses to install the most water efficient technology in restaurants, car washes, and cooling towers.

And SAWS works aggressively to educate and involve the community by way of radio call-in shows, weekly TV and news columns, and numerous events and awards each year that highlight water conservation efforts.

Although San Antonio's efforts to date have added up to big savings, they are the first to admit there is still more they can do to conserve. And all this efficiency has been achieved without affecting growth or quality of life. In fact, 70% of respondents to a citizen survey about the enforcement of watering guidelines said it was "too lenient."

For more on San Antonio's water conservation program, go to www.saws.org.