

Water Budgeting for Commercial Landscapes



TODAY'S SPEAKERS

- **Sarah LaVoy** – Environmental Protection Specialist, EPA WaterSense
- **Liesel Hans** – Director of Programs, Alliance for Water Efficiency
- **Jeff Lee** – Water Conservation Specialist, Town of Gilbert (AZ) Conservation Office

ORIGINAL DATE:
JUNE 28TH, 2022

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WEBINAR SUMMARY

Sarah kicked off the webinar by introducing how seasonal changes in climate along with increasing trends of global warming place stress on local water supply systems during periods of peak demand. Much of the increase in water demand during the summer months can be attributed to outdoor use in the landscape. In instances of extreme water supply shortages, many communities have turned to restrict water use through mandates and legislation. Shared commercial landscapes face unique challenges to manage outdoor water use but those challenges can also offer creative opportunities to cut water waste. Cutting water waste outdoors is an easy way to protect your local water supply and save money on your water bill.

AWE UPDATE: LIESEL HANS

Liesel provided an overview of Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) and reiterated their mission to promote an efficient and sustainable water future. AWE has several useful resources available on their website (<https://www.allianceforwaterefficiency.org/>) including reports on the market readiness of landscape transformation, the effectiveness and municipal irrigation restrictions during drought, and sustainable landscape guides. AWE also has an initiative, "Financing Sustainable Water", aimed at guiding utilities through rate structures.

FEATURED SPEAKER: JEFF LEE

The featured speaker, Jeff, introduced the Town of Gilbert's Landscape Water Budget Program 2.0. The program began in 2009 when the town identified the opportunity to create water budgets for Homeowner Associations with more than one acre of turf. Turfgrass area was measured through aerial photos. A budget of supplemental water needs for the space was estimated using these areas and the historical evapotranspiration data. The conservation office then compared the budgeted volume of water to actual use and found that these identified spaces had 381,031,000 gallons of potential water savings. Using this data Gilbert decided to target the HOAs with large potentials for water savings and encourage their enrollment in the Water Budget Program. The program established a goal to get all participants within 20% of the budgeted amount of irrigation, and all HOAs that fell within 10% of their calculated budget are given an exceptional status. To reach this goal the conservation office provided monthly updates to the HOAs

WaterSense Materials at
<https://www.epa.gov/watersense>

- [Find a Certified Irrigation Professional in your area](#)
- [Watering tips to manage your irrigation system](#)

involved clearly stating the status of their water use, how much precipitation they had received and how the city's water budget fared overall. The program's success led to tremendous growth and the Town of Gilbert launch a new version, Water Budget Program 2.0, which updated and automated the process of managing increasing numbers of participants through a platform called, Waterfluence. It has the capacity to easily record water use trends and detect and filter sites with monthly spikes, daily spikes, potential leaks, etc. Using this data, the Town of Gilbert is able to work with high water users quickly and effectively to identify and mitigate the causes of high-water use. Their program now manages 298 sites making up 52.6% of all non-single family residential landscapes and in 2022 they saw 105,000,000 gallons of savings and \$291,900 in avoided water costs. Participating sites that are within 20% of their budget for the year are awarded the title and label, "Water Wise Landscape." This past year the program awarded the title to 119 sites and those communities are seeing increased interest and market value from the label.

CONCLUSION

The Landscape Water Budget Program of Gilbert, AZ continues to grow with continual interest to work towards capturing all potential water savings. The automated nature of the Water Budget Program Version 2.0 collects more information for the stakeholder and allows the conservation office more time for outreach and site visits. The success of the Water Budget Program 2.0 has yielded inspiring results and advances conservation efforts of the Town of Gilbert. With growing trends of drought in the west it is now more important than ever to minimize water over-use within the landscape. Water Budget Programs can be a useful tool for municipalities to protect their water sources.

SPEAKER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Do you have plans to update water budget goals with growing drought in the West?

A: Yes, over the past decade or so the goal of the Water Budget Program has been to reduce excess water use, to not use more than we have. The town of Gilbert has several sources of water supply to supplement given changes in water availability, but in the extreme case that those do not suffice, they are also prepared to ask participants for water deficits. In addition to the attention given to irrigation, they also plan to educate members of the community on other best management practices to maintain drought-tolerant landscapes with a particular emphasis on maintaining tree canopies.

Q: How did you manage the need for staff as the program grew?

A: The digital platform of Version 2.0 allowed for a large decrease in hours needed to maintain data and send out monthly email updates. This allowed staff time to focus on site visits and enroll more sites into the program.

Q: What format did you use to reach out to HOAs in the beginning of the program?

A: HOA board members and managers wear a lot of hats and getting their attention initially was difficult and slow. With consistent contact and time managers began to see the benefits of participation in the program and through word-of-mouth between HOA managers the program began to grow. Once the program had enough participants, they were able to establish value in the community Water Wise label and continue to engage interest in the program.