

Help, I've fallen behind and I can't catch up. An 84 year-old Florida woman almost had cardiac arrest when she saw her \$419 water bill and couldn't understand why. A trouble-shooter from the local utility company found her automatic irrigation system wasn't properly programmed and was running amok, driving up her water bill. Other members of the "Greatest Generation" such as my parents, War Babies my age and a ton of baby boomers are also falling further behind in this high-tech world. But it doesn't take a computer geek to turn off the water when it's raining.

Water management districts don't have the money, personnel or access to ride herd on the public's irrigation controllers. People who can't program VCRs or cell phones evidently can't handle 12-station clocks on garage walls either. This is where most of the public water waste occurs. As the millions of acres of residential, commercial and municipal turfgrass goes mismanaged or unmanaged, the water crisis continues to make headlines.

But this crisis is self-inflicted. Regional areas run out of cheap accessible water because they allow growth without providing alternative solutions to offset the increasing demand on existing watersheds. We may be running low on "cheap" water, but we are not running out of water. Until coastal states develop more desalinization plants and all communities recycle effluent for irrigation, the media shouldn't demonize or trivialize the more visible water users such as golf. According to a recent Golf Economic Impact study, there are 4 million acres of lawn turf and 140,000 acres of irrigated golf turf in Florida. The public sector uses 30 percent of the water; golf uses 3.5 percent.

Agriculture (the biggest user of water) and golf (one of the smallest) still get hammered in the press, even though both manage and recycle water better than John Q. Public. Our management skills are overlooked and we are made the scapegoats because people can't figure out a day-of-the-week push-pin dial, a 0-to-60-minute station dial and the off/auto switch. A roving irrigation tech on the city payroll who shuts down systems during rainy weather could

Responsibility Lacking, Not H₂O

BY JOEL JACKSON



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save tons of water and money and set a good example.

As the agriculture and green industries move forward with new technology, the homeowner sector is falling behind. The irrigation designers, manufacturers and installers are missing a huge market share by not bringing residential equipment and design into the 21st century. Place an on/off switch by the kitchen/office window so mom/building manager can turn it off when they see it's raining. A system also needs periodic maintenance to be most efficient, but first things first.

So much for the end-users; our politicians aren't immune to falling short either. After years of cutting budgets to land grant universities that support agriculture and green industries, urbanized legislatures have literally and figuratively abandoned their roots. In trying to remake states into high-tech economies, they have turned their backs on the agri-business industries that kept many states solvent during the recent economic slowdown.

Farms, groves, ranches, nurseries and golf courses are going high-tech to be economically efficient and environmentally friendly, but they aren't getting much public help or recognition. Poorly managed growth overloads and depletes our natural resources. Investment in alternative water sources and conservation measures lags behind the growth curve. It is urban sprawl and ignorant people that are wasting water, not those who work the land.

Our water woes will continue until individual homeowners and municipalities take seriously their responsibility for practical water use and conservation instead of trying to solve the problem by blaming turfgrass and penalizing small niche users like golf.

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