


Water Quality & Conservation

This tip sheet corresponds with Green Star Award Standard # 4 – Reduce Energy and Water Consumption. Another useful tool is Chapter 7 in “Becoming a Green Star: A Waste Prevention Guide for Anchorage Businesses.”

You can find the guide online in pdf and html format at www.greenstarinc.org/guideindex.php or request a hard copy from Green Star.

Water Quality

Water is only useful to us if it is clean. Consider these tips for maintaining water quality:

- Don't put any hazardous materials down the drain. Always read the directions on the packaging to determine proper disposal of chemicals and cleaners. If you have questions, contact the Municipality's Solid Waste Services at 343-6262.
- Install and maintain proper containment systems for vehicle maintenance activities including catch drains, berms, and an oil/water separator. 
- Properly dispose of waste oils, antifreeze, and other chemicals. Do not mix the wastes; properly store them in secure, closed containers; and label the containers
- Use environmentally safer antifreeze/coolant like propylene glycol rather than ethylene glycol. Propylene glycol is considered generally safe even as a food additive, while exposure to ethylene glycol can cause kidney, heart, and nervous system damage 
- Carefully consider your options for snow melt and traction sand in winter. See Tip Sheet #15 for information about snow melt products.
- Properly sweep parking lots in the spring to avoid sand and gravel, which may be contaminated with road oils and chemicals, from flowing into stormwater drains.

Indoor Workplace Water Conservation

We all know that taking shorter showers and turning off the faucet while we brush our teeth will help save water at home but what can we do at the office?

- Install high-efficiency, low-flow faucet aerators in sinks. Older faucets use between 3 and 7 gallons per minute. Low-flow faucet aerators use no more than 1.5 gallons of water per minute. The aerators can be attached to most existing faucets.
- Keep drinking water in the refrigerator. Running faucets wastes 3 to 7 gallons of water per minute. If everybody in the office let the faucet run until the water cooled down, hundreds of gallons of water would be wasted every day. Instead, keep a container of drinking water in the refrigerator.
- Fill your break room dishwasher if you have one. Your dishwasher uses the same amount of water whether it is full or just partially full of dishes, so be sure to fill it. Many dishwashers have a water saver cycle to save even more water.
- No dishwasher? Don't let the water go down the drain. Put the sink stopper in place instead of running the water continuously.
- Check all faucets, pipes, and toilets periodically for leaks and fix immediately. A faucet drip or invisible leak in the toilet can add up to 15-20 gallons of water a day, or more than 100 gallons a week, which adds up to more than 5,000 gallons of wasted water a year.
- Use unclaimed, half-consumed bottles of water left in the break room to water office plants instead of dumping them down the drain.
- Think twice about making that last pot of coffee if you're only going to have one cup.

How to Check for Toilet Leaks

Once a year, request that the maintenance crew check all the toilets for leaks. Remove the toilet tank cover and drip 10 drops of food coloring into the tank. After 15 minutes, check for color in the toilet bowl. If you see any color, your toilet has a leak and should be repaired immediately. Remember to check the flapper periodically to ensure a tight fit.

Outdoor Water Conservation

Many workplaces have outdoor landscaping. Here is an area where you can make or break your water conservation habits.

- Interrupt watering when puddles or runoff occur. This allows the water to penetrate into the soil before resuming irrigation.

- Water the lawn only when needed. Step on the grass; if it springs back up when you move your foot, it does not need water.



- Spot water. Drier areas require more water than areas where water settles. If necessary, water dry areas by hand.

- Use a soil probe to test soil moisture. Water only when a soil probe shows dry soil or a screwdriver is difficult to push into the soil.

- Don't water the pavement. Position sprinklers so that water lands on the lawn or garden, not in areas where it is not needed. Remember if it doesn't grow, don't water it!

- Avoid watering during the day or when it is windy. Watering during these times causes water to evaporate or be blown onto areas where it is not needed.

- Use shut-off nozzles. Shut-off nozzles can turn off the water when you are not using it.



- Use an automatic sprinkler system to save time and water. Set the system to water the lawn for a specified amount of time. Outdoor faucets can flow at rates as high as 300 gallons per hour so be sure to set the system for only as long as necessary. Be sure to adjust the watering schedule so you are not watering unnecessarily before or after a heavy rain.

- Consider drip irrigation systems around trees and shrubs. Drip systems permit water to flow slowly to roots, encouraging strong root systems. These systems will also cut down evaporation.

- Use a broom instead of a power hose to clean sidewalks. Sweeping the sidewalks will get them clean enough without wasting gallons of water.

- Keep lawn free of weeds. Weeds are water thieves and will rob your plants of water and nutrients. Remove weeds manually as they appear if possible. Do not take this as an excuse to use chemical pesticides, which are far worse for the environment than a few water-hogging weeds.

- Use natural fertilizers and match fertilizer to the plant requirement. Fertilizer applications require additional water. Excess fertilizer stimulates top growth, often to the detriment of the root system. Learn to accept turf grasses with low water needs.

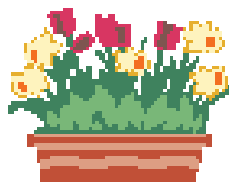


- Mow as infrequently as possible. Mowing puts the grass under additional stress that requires more water.

- Mow higher than normal. Longer leaf surfaces promote deeper rooting and shade the root zone. Never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade in one mowing. Return mulched clippings to the lawn.

- Accept a less than lush lawn. Grass will naturally go dormant during periods of drought, but will readily regenerate when water becomes available. Reduce traffic on stressed turf areas if possible.

- Use landscaping plants that suit the climate. For example, tropical plants are not appropriate for Anchorage. Consider low maintenance and low water plants. Also look for shade- or sun-tolerant plants, depending on your landscape.



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