

TANK TESTERS IN TRAINING

Fifth-grade students test their toilets for fix-a-leak week

By Sarah Pryor
Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA – Zoe Ybarra's dad Paul may consider himself an expert on Waukesha water, but Zoe found out one thing he didn't know about it: two of their home's three toilets had leaks, potentially flushing hundreds of dollars down the drain.

In honor of Fix-a-Leak week, fifth-graders from Banting, Heyer, Lowell, and Meadowbrook elementary schools teamed up with the Waukesha Water Utility, recording the age of their toilets and measuring the tanks to calculate gallons of water used per flush, said Water Resource Assistant Mary Adelmeyer.

The fun part of the project for 10-year-old Zoe was using dye to test whether her home's toilets had a leak.

"I put the dye in the tank and waited 30 minutes, and if the water (in the bowl) turns a color you have a leak," said Zoe, whose dad is a former Common Council president and current member of the Waukesha Water Commission.



A toilet repair kit purchased by Paul Ybarra to repair one of the two toilets his daughter, Zoe, found was leaking while testing them for a school project.

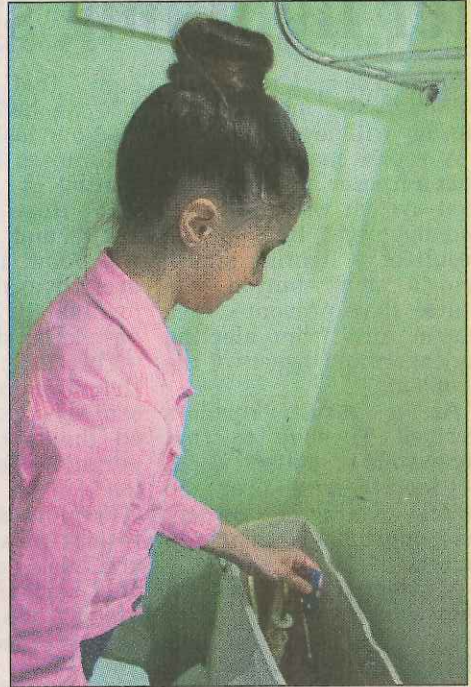
Much to Zoe's – and her dad's – surprise, two of the Ybarras' three toilets had leaks, which Zoe discovered could cost the family \$80 per quarter.

"Leaks can cost people a lot of money," Zoe said.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency's Water-Sense partnership program, a drip as small as 1/32 of an inch can waste 18,500 gallons a quarter. By the time the leak gets up to a quarter-inch stream, your toilet is wasting more than a million gallons every three months.

The good news, Zoe said, is that it's "really easy" for people to test their toilets themselves.

Test your toilet at home by dropping a few drops of food coloring into the tank and waiting half an hour to check whether the bowl water has changed



Charles Auer/Freeman Staff

Meadowbrook 5th-grade student Zoe Ybarra puts dye into a toilet tank in her home Wednesday afternoon. Ybarra discovered two of her family's toilets had leaks while testing as part of a class project.

color. If so, you've got a leak on your hands.

Students also determined whether their toilets were eligible for the utility's \$100 toilet rebate, which offers \$100 to customers who replace their pre-1994 high-volume toilets with a WaterSense High-Efficiency toilet.

Of these toilets that the students tested, 15 percent were leaking and 22 percent qualified for the rebate, Adelmeyer said. About 95 percent of the parents were notified about the utility's toilet rebate program.

Paul said he was excited and a little embarrassed to share Zoe's discovery with the Water Utility Commission.

He's a little less excited about his next project: repairing a couple of toilets.

For more information, or to see if you qualify for the toilet rebate, visit www.ci.waukesha.wi.us/waterhome.

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