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## **Waukesha Requires Irrigation Systems to be Water Efficient**

### *New Conservation Ordinance Adds to Daytime Sprinkling Ban*

The Waukesha City Council added another device to its water conservation toolkit tonight.

The Council adopted an ordinance requiring that new landscape irrigation systems include mechanisms to shut them off if it is raining or if the soil already has enough moisture for plants. The systems must also be installed so they cannot operate in ways that violate the city's daytime sprinkling ban. The vote was 15-0.

"The new ordinance requires that people installing irrigation systems use EPA WaterSense controllers to conserve water," according to Alderman Terry Thieme, who is also a water utility commissioner. "Waukesha is proud to again provide water conservation leadership. We believe we are the first community in the state to adopt this requirement."

In addition to requiring moisture sensors, the ordinance requires that systems be installed to prevent sprinkling of impervious surfaces or areas covered by other sprinklers. It requires zones for different types of areas and plant types, and restricts water to the minimum amount necessary. The ordinance applies to systems installed, replaced or materially altered on or after January 1, 2016 and requires that plans be submitted to the City to obtain a permit.

The ordinance was developed with input from irrigation installers, the City Building Inspector and the City Attorney. The required sensors start at about \$200 but can cost more than \$1,000. However, they also can save 30% to 50% on summer water bills and reduce landscape runoff by as much as 71%. The more expensive ones have receptors that use data from weather services.

The City already bans sprinkling between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., whether with sprinklers or irrigation systems. Sprinkling at other hours is limited to two days per week. That ordinance was the first of its type in Wisconsin. Waukesha was also the first community to adopt water rates that increase with use in order to encourage conservation, and was the first to offer rebates for replacement of inefficient toilets. Other elements of its plans include public outreach and education. More information about water conservation is available at [www.waukesha-water.com](http://www.waukesha-water.com).

"Our goal is to save 365 million gallons of water by 2050, or 10% of the water that we would otherwise use," according to Dan Duchniak, general manager of the Waukesha Water Utility. "We are proud to say we are currently ahead of schedule. However, we will continue to identify cost-effective measures we can implement to meet our goal."

Duchniak said the utility's experience in implementing the plan led to a change in focus in 2014 to work more closely with specific customers with the potential for significant water savings. The change was a success. Waukesha new savings in 2014 were nearly 6.0 million gallons, or 63% more than the approximately 3.7 million gallons under the initial 2012 plan.

### **Conservation cannot prevent the need for a Lake Michigan water supply**

Waukesha's current groundwater supplies are unsustainable for the long term and naturally occurring contaminants are increasing as water levels drop. The City has applied to use Lake Michigan water. It would return the same amount of lake water as it withdraws after use and treatment, ensuring sustainability.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has issued a draft analysis concluding that lake water is Waukesha's only reasonable alternative. "Regardless of our water source, conservation will be an important part of our efforts," Duchniak said. "But even with water conservation, we will still need a water supply. In fact, treatment systems that would be needed if we remained on groundwater would waste more water than we would save through conservation."

Waukesha's primary water supply is covered by a layer of shale that restricts recharge from rain and snow. Regional demand on the aquifer in southeastern Wisconsin and northeastern Illinois has also contributed to the severe drawdown in the groundwater.

The DNR's draft analysis found that even if Waukesha used 15% less water than what is projected with conservation, continued use of groundwater would have unreasonable impacts on the environment, including harm to 700 to 2,300 acres of wetlands, as well as streams, lakes and aquifers. The DNR is expected to finalize its analysis soon.

Because Waukesha is 1.5 miles outside of the Lake Michigan surface divide, its application for water also needs approval from the eight governors of Great Lakes states under the Great Lakes Compact.

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