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Waste not Want not
UT to replace 6,000 toilets and other fixtures in effort

By Sean Beherec


Media Credit: Mark Estrada

Every year, the University uses 400 million gallons of water for its cooling plants and another 400 million gallons for irrigation purposes. With these high numbers, several departments on campus are increasing the University's sustainability through water conservation.

The Division of Housing and Food Service, the facilities services department and the utilities and energy management department are working together with the city of Austin to focus on conservation efforts around campus.

"It's the good environmental thing to do and a good way to preserve financial resources, as well," said Laurie Lentz, spokeswoman for the Department of Facilities Services.

Bill Lucas, associate director of Facilities Services, said the department has finished the auditing phase of a project, with installations to be completed by the end of the year. The department will replace 6,000 toilets and other fixtures in nonresidential buildings and will alter industrial and irrigation water use to improve efficiency.

He said water conservation, lighting and steam are the main focuses for the University's Demand-Side Energy Management and Conservation effort to lower costs.

"We want to spend the money we get as efficiently as possible," he said.

Juan Ontiveros, director of the utilities and energy management department, said 50 million gallons per year come from the recovered water system on campus, which is designed to collect and use water already on campus.

"Our philosophy is of being good stewards of the University's dollars and the environment," he said.

The recovered water system has been used on campus since the 1980s. Rusty Osborne, technical staff assistant for the utilities and energy management department, said he designed a project in 1995 that cut potable water use in the turtle pond from 300,000 gallons per month to 30,000 by using recirculated water. He said the University also uses French draining systems to collect water that accumulates beneath building foundations.

Osborne said the recovered water system collects groundwater, once-through cooling water from research equipment, condensed water from air conditioning and water from drained swimming pools and other sources.

The planned changes will save approximately $2 million per year on utility costs, Lentz said.

The facilities services department is following similar changes implemented over the years in residential buildings and University apartments by the housing division. Changes in residential buildings include converting all showerheads and some toilets to more efficient models and installing aerators, which reduce the flow of water and increase pressure, said Randall Porter, associate director of the housing division.

The division also recently replaced 302 clothes washers following a seven-year contract with a vendor. The new machines, which are on a new 10-year contract with the same vendor, will save an estimated $10,000 per year on utility expenses. The washers are also applicable for a $150 rebate per unit from Austin's water conservation program, Porter said.

Dan Strub, division manager for water conservation at Austin Water Utility, said the rebate program began in 1992 with rebates for replacing old toilets with more efficient models.

"It's cheaper to do conservation than to build new treatment plants," Strub said. "As Austin grows, demand grows, but we hope with conservation our demand grows more slowly."