

Time to call in the Sprinkler Police!

How many times have you been driving through the neighborhood and seen sprinklers busy watering the streets and driveways, with runoff just streaming along in the gutters? How about sprinklers on esplanades -- often maintained by homeowner associations or local businesses -- running full blast **in the rain?**

Do you find yourself asking, "Who would do that?" The answer, is obviously lots of people. You'd like to think that no one would do it on purpose, but even if it is just carelessness, the water is being wasted all the same.

These days, irrigation systems often have automatic timers so, unless someone manually turns them OFF, they just continue to complete their appointed task, day in and day out -- even during rainstorms and extended periods of rainy weather. But now that the cost of water is going up, hopefully more people will have second thoughts about wasting our valuable drinking water on streets and sidewalks and on plants that aren't thirsty.

Over-watering isn't just wasteful, it's bad for your plants, too.

Over-watering is one of the most frequent lawn care mistakes home-owners make. Too much water promotes a shallow root system, which causes grass and plants to become vulnerable to hot/dry weather. Lawns irrigated everyday or even three or four times a week, cause grasses and plants to develop shallow root systems that cannot survive without frequent watering. During drought conditions, or in hot weather, these "addicted" plants and grasses wilt quickly. And, if grass is cut to a height of one or two inches, the problem is compounded because the top few inches of soil dries out quickly in hot weather, and plants and grasses are further starved for water.

With less frequent watering, root systems push deeper into the soil looking for water. The goal is to irrigate deeply once per week applying approximately 1" of water. Using the cycle/soak method on the irrigation controller, water will penetrate 4 to 6 inches into the soil rather than running into the street.

There are things we can do to help...

As individuals, we can make sure that a rain sensor is installed on our own irrigation system and that it is operating as it should. We can also complain when we see neighborhood or commercial sprinkler systems running inappropriately -- whether that is in the rain, right after a good rain (enough to sink into the soil), or when sprinkler heads are not properly aimed and water sidewalks and streets. It might take a few minutes to locate the responsible party, but unless someone makes the effort, the waste will continue.

Unfortunately, some experts warn that folks will not really get too concerned about conserving water until we feel the pinch in the 'pocket-book.' This has certainly been true in the energy field, when the cost of oil has steadily increased in recent years and impacted the retail or consumer prices for gasoline and electricity. When the price gets high enough, we cut back on what we use. **Our natural resources are finite...we can't afford to waste any of them!** ■



What is a rain sensor and why do I need one?

A rain sensor is a small device wired to the common line on an automatic sprinkler system designed to override the automatic watering cycle when a certain level of rainfall is detected. The shut-off level is usually set at 1/4-inch of rain.

The sensors do not affect the sprinkler system's overall timing device. Once the collection dish dries out, the automatic timer kicks in.

The three primary benefits of installing a rain sensor are:

- **Cost savings** -- the sprinkler system shuts off when adequate rainfall is received, thus saving money on water bills.
- **System savings** -- there is less wear and tear on the sprinkler system because it only runs when necessary.
- **Lawn protection** -- reduces potential damage to the lawn caused by over-watering.

There are some exciting new products in the rain sensor arena...some that actually forecast the weather and keep your system from coming on if rain is expected. Whether you use high tech or no tech methods, don't allow your irrigation system to waste water....period. ♦