

## **CASE STUDY: SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA**

**Program Name:** Get WET (Water Efficient Toilet) Toilet Rebate Program

**Agency Name:** Sarasota County Environmental Services Utilities

**Contact Person:** Linda Seashore Larsen, Water Conservation Coordinator

### **Contact Information:**

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**Number of Customers:** 60,000 hookups

### **Program Description:**

To provide a monetary incentive for homeowners to replace their existing high-volume toilets with 1.6 gallons-per-flush water efficient toilets. This reduces consumption of customers and thus reduces the demand on the source.

Customers are notified in their water bills. The program is handled completely in-house with no outside assistance. Those wishing to participate call for a reservation number and an application is mailed to them. The reservation number is good for 30 days. The customers select, purchase, and install the water-conserving toilet. The original receipt is required along with the completed application. A light-duty volunteer from Utilities inspects ten percent of the homeowner-installed toilets. Evaluations are tabulated along with customer information (name, address, phone, etc.) The rebates are a credit placed on the utility bills thereby helping to ensure that only our customers, and not those in nearby cities, use the program.

**Program Beginning:** 1995

**Target Audience:** Utilities customers. Nearly 9,000 toilets have been replaced. Funding is in place to continue the program for a minimum of two additional years.

### **Program Cost and Funding:**

- ❑ **Materials Cost:** Utilities has spent \$795,050 and replaced 8,921 units.
- ❑ **Staff Time:** One coordinator, one data entry person, and one volunteer inspector. All work is done in addition to other duties.
- ❑ **Funding Source:** Utilities paid for the entire program until 2000, when cooperative funding was obtained from the Manasota Basin Board of Southwest Florida Water Management District. The funding in this program is 50 percent and does not include salaries.

**Program Objective/Driving Force:**

Since 1994, all new county construction required 1.6-gallon toilets or less to be installed. This project is an attempt to bring up to code older homes. This is a proven method of reducing water consumption. Reducing water consumption reduces the amount of water that the utility must withdraw from the aquifer. It also frees up capacity within existing withdrawal rates, allowing the utility to add more customers without having to increase water withdrawals. For every 15 toilets replaced, Utilities can add one new household without impacting the resource. Water conservation is the least expensive source for additional water resources.

**Program Type:** Agency specific. Customers in our community

**What Works Best:**

We see this as an educational program. People are aware now that water-conserving toilets are out there, and we are able to provide figures demonstrating a 97 percent satisfaction rate with the new toilets. This helps in the face of some perceptions that these toilets do not work.

**What Would Change:**

The first two years we issued checks. This was a burden because we had to get everyone's social security number, and the finance staff had to individually print and mail each and every check. In recent years, we have gone to credits on bills. This eliminates participation by people who are not really our customers, can be done with a few keystrokes, and we are sure that the person who pays the bill actually gets the rebate.

**Evaluation of Effectiveness:**

Each participant completes an evaluation form. We track them on a specially designed database that our IT staff designed in Access. We have not had the personnel to go back and track each participant and water consumption over time. We rely on data from nearby communities and respected researchers.