



September/ October 2005 Newsletter: Tips & Suggestions:

Benefits of Switching to a "Smart" Irrigation Controller to Manage Your Site

By Julio Sánchez

The SmarTimer Rebate Program:

The Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC), in partnership with retail water agencies throughout Orange County, is providing incentive rebates for residential and commercial property owners to upgrade old irrigation timers\controllers to new "smart" technology. These state-of-the art "smart" timers conserve water, save money, improve plant health, and reduce runoff by automating landscape watering based on the weather and water needs of plants.

If the sites you manage are over-irrigated, your clients are probably paying excessively high water bills. That's money that's literally going down the drain...money that could be better used for irrigation system improvements.

Over-irrigation is the single greatest year-round contributor to urban runoff. As this runoff makes its way into curbs and storm drains, it transports pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, animal waste, motor oil, and trash into local creeks and the Pacific

Ocean. Water from over-irrigated sites - or those that have inefficient irrigation systems - also damages asphalt, shortens the life of fencing and other structures, and leads to premature and costly repairs.

"Smart" irrigation timers reduce excessive irrigation by utilizing historic weather data or "real time" weather information to automatically adjust irrigation schedules.

For additional information on the SmarTimer Rebate Program, visit the program's website at www.mwdoc.com/SmarTimer/ or contact the program's administrator at (866) 846-3725

Why Replace?:

Switching to a "smart" irrigation timer\controller has three major benefits:

1. It provides an accurate, weather-based method for watering properties. By watering plant material more efficiently, money will be saved on the water bill and plant health and aesthetics will improve.
2. It reduces the need for the landscape contractor to visit the timer\controller to adjust watering schedules for multiple valves on the property. While many landscape contractors have an "expert" on staff to program and adjust irrigation schedules at the controller - hopefully on a frequent schedule - adjusting controllers to weather conditions on a weekly basis is somewhat labor intensive and costly.

What do YOU want to know?

Send questions related to landscape water use and runoff reduction to: ConserVision
 Fax: (949) 215-6184
 or e-mail:

julio@econservision.com

Missed Last Month's Issue?

You can download any of our present and past newsletters at:
www.waterprograms.com

3. It reduces urban runoff, eliminating costly National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) fines.

Site Audit:

Before selecting your new timer\controller, you should first perform a site audit. A thorough site audit collects the following information:

Area Measurement: Your landscape professional or the controller's installation contractor should turn on each valve in your existing controller to identify the exact area being covered by the sprinklers. This area needs to be measured as part of the rebate process, and it will be verified by the rebate center's customer service technician. If you are already participating in the LPCP, you already have the area measurement per meter (you can look it up under the meter view when you log-in to the LPCP Program website at www.waterbudgets.com).

Per Valve Details: Every valve should be audited to acquire information such as type of spray head (or rotor, bubblers, drip, etc.); type of plant material; type of soil; percent planted on slope and slope gradient; root depth; and sun exposure. For valves irrigating grass, you may also want to know the precipitation rate and the distribution uniformity. This is also a good time to make note of how many valves are actually functioning. Most irrigation technicians carry a multimeter to check if there is a current being sent/received from the controller to the valve (sometimes hundreds of yards away from the controller)

It is important to remember that if your site has existing irrigation system problems (brown spots, over-watering in some areas, faulty sprayheads\rotors), a new controller will not fix these problems, and may even aggravate them. If you are uncomfortable with performing your own site audit, most irrigation contractors have a certified irrigation auditor on staff that can perform the audit for you.

Shopping Around:

Once you have completed the site audit, it is time to choose the "smart" timer that best fits your site's needs. Visit the SmarTimer website (www.mwdoc.com/SmarTimer/) for a list of eligible manufacturers and controllers. The manufacturers list provided on the website reflects products that have shown verifiable results and good customer service. The technologies, although different, all have demonstrated a safe degree of performance.

Conclusion:

If your site is already participating in the LPCP, you can check which of your meters are consistently over watering (and perhaps causing run-off). Because of the savings potential, these meters are prime candidates for replacement. Hiring an experienced contractor is the best way to accomplish a replacement. Each manufacturer should have a list of qualified installation contractors they can refer you to, or you can work with your own landscape contractor for installation assistance..