

Evaluation uncovers home water waste

By Kathryn Reed

All it took was looking at the tank size and the handle for the water wise evaluator to know the toilet was installed before 1992. In the world of toilets, that's pretty darn old. Even worse, it's a water hog.

Toilets already use the most amount of water of any household appliance – 26 percent. And an old one, well, it's practically off the charts.

That was one of the many lessons I learned when Donielle Morse came to my house this month to perform a water wise evaluation. South Tahoe Public Utility District offers this service for free so people can learn ways to conserve water, identify leaks, and figure out if apparatuses are efficient.

“Not efficient” was the finding for one of the two toilets. STPUD has a rebate offer now of up to \$100 if pre-1992 toilets are replaced with a high efficiency toilet that flushes 1.28 gallons. Ours is flushing at least 2 gallons each time.



Donielle Morse tests the flow of water at the kitchen sink. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Then Morse gave me a bit of a lecture about what to be flushing. There was a huge spider in the bathtub when she went to check things there. I killed it with a tissue. It went in the garbage – because she said so – instead of down the drain.

“Only toilet paper breaks down,” Morse, who is a water conservation specialist, told me. “Even tissues don’t break down as well as toilet paper. If you were going to flush the spider, you would have wasted 1.6 gallons.”

And she also said the flushable wipes that are sold in stores are flushable in the sense they go down the drain. The problem is they don’t decompose. So in the water-sewer world they really aren’t flushable.

Before Morse makes a house call she does a little research to see if people are on meters. (Not yet for us.) She looks at water consumption. She checks the age of a house because those built before 1992 are likely to have water-guzzling units. That is the year plumbing codes changed for low flow devices.

A low flow toilet, like in the guest bath, is a 1.6-gallon toilet.

Then Morse asks a series of questions to help her evaluate how our use might be changed to save some water. (I think I would use paper plates before I sacrifice long, hot showers.)

Questions include length of showers, how many a week, how many people in a household and things about irrigation.

Every place there is a faucet she looks for leaks. She even does this with the toilets by dropping a dye tablet into the tank.

Morse has a goodie bag of sorts with her. She leaves me with two aerators for the bathroom faucets. These were easy to screw in. They reduce the amount of water coming out so less is wasted.

Showerheads, kitchen sink aerators and toilet flappers can also be distributed for free of charge if she sees the need and people will use them.

The washing machine was replaced a few years ago, so nothing more to be done in that room. The district still offers a rebate on washing machines, which helped us save some money. Washing machines are the second largest water using appliance.

When it comes to washing dishes, Morse says, "Even older dishwashers are more efficient than hand washing."

All California households are supposed to reduce their water consumption by 20 percent as outlined in Gov. Jerry Brown's drought declaration earlier this year.

Snow was on the ground so we could not test the sprinklers for efficiency.

STPUD continues to offer its turf buyback program.

Water restrictions will be enforced this year. Even numbered addresses may water on Monday, Wednesday and Friday; odd numbered on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Morse suggests people adjust their sprinklers monthly to compensate for temperature. A yard doesn't need the same amount of water in June as it does in August.

"We recommend watering in the early morning or evening to prevent evaporation," Morse said. It's also less windy at those times.

There are even high-efficiency sprinkler heads.

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Notes:

- To schedule a water wise evaluation, contact Donielle Morse at 530.543.6368 or dmorse@stpud.dst.ca.us.