

# water suppliers



## The Water Resource Protection and Conservation Toolkit

This is one of a series of 12 fact sheets developed by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission with funding from the Joyce Foundation for the Water Resources Protection and Conservation Toolkit. The toolkit provides background on, and methods to protect and conserve local water resources. These tools are intended to help citizens and local officials to manage and protect water resources for future generations.

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[www.nirpc.org](http://www.nirpc.org)

## How Can Water Suppliers Protect and Conserve Water Resources?

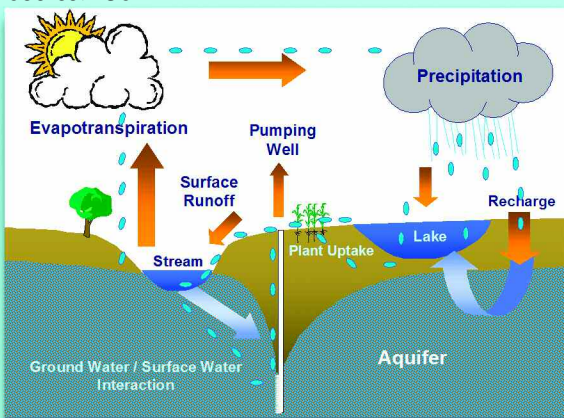


**B**ecause the competition for water among various users is becoming more complex, the efficient use of available supplies is essential. The benefits of implementing water conservation concepts throughout a water supply service area are many and should be carefully examined.

- Conservation will save money for consumers on water, sewer, and water heating bills.
- Conservation will reduce such impacts on the environment as lowering stream flows and lake levels and depleting groundwater aquifers.
- Conservation will decrease the amount of wastewater generated, and thereby, maintain the operating efficiency of treatment plants over a longer period of time.
- Conservation will reduce operating costs for utilities and delay costly capital improvements. When compared to the cost of expanding existing facilities or developing new water sources, the most cost-effective alternative is conservation.

Many states have water conservation programs working for them today. These programs can provide a wealth of information for planning your own program. Each supplier will have to consider its own situation and needs of its customers to determine what might work best. Below is a summary of types of water conservation incentives programs water suppliers can implement from the Environmental Protection Agency's Customer Incentives for Water Conservation: A Guide. The full guide can be found on the included CD or at [www.nirpc.org](http://www.nirpc.org).

Source: USEPA



## Water Resources and The Natural Water (or Hydrologic) Cycle

Water resources can be significantly affected by development activities. Water resources move through the water cycle, sometimes called the hydrologic cycle. The water cycle is the continuous movement of water from ocean, lakes, rivers, and other water bodies to air and land then back to these water bodies through rain and snow in a cyclic pattern as water is used and re-used. Some water infiltrates (or seeps into) the ground or evaporates back into the atmosphere.



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## Types of Incentives

**1. PUBLIC EDUCATION** – One critical form of incentives is to establish an information network for your customers. Many lack knowledge about conserving water and this information may contribute to customers using water more efficiently. Public education is the driving force behind the success of any program.

**2. AUDITS** – Audits can provide valuable information to customers that will persuade them to participate in conservation programs.

Residential audits involve sending trained agency staff, contractors, community groups or students to evaluate indoor and/or outdoor water uses. Some water agencies offer audits to all residential customers, while others target certain customers based on housing type (e.g., all single-family residences or pre-1980 buildings) or on amount of water use (e.g., top 15% of users). Many of the residential audit programs include direct installation of conservation devices.

**3. DISTRIBUTION AND INSTALLING DEVICES** – Distributing conservation devices is another incentive to increase your customer's participation level when conserving water. This type of program usually provides the customer with the devices necessary at little or no cost. Many utility companies that distribute these kits prefer this incentive approach because the kits are inexpensive and they can be distributed easily to a wide variety of residential customers. The costs of the kits can vary from \$0.50 to \$25, depending on which conservation items are included.

**4. CASH INCENTIVES** – Another effective tool for obtaining customer participation is cash incentives, which can include rebates, vouchers, or bill adjustments. In a typical rebate, the water agency may make a cash payment after the device is purchased and installed. The agency may offer payment for other actions, such as landscaping, where customers are paid to install low water use landscaping or to change all or part of their lawn to a non-turf landscape. Vouchers, on the other hand, help pay for the conservation device at the time of purchase. Vouchers do not make the customer wait for weeks or months for reimbursement and they provide the customer with up-front money to help them make the purchase. Bill adjustments reduce the amount that the customer pays to the water agency. This adjustment may be a one-time reduction or a continuous discount on their monthly bills.

## Conservation in Action

Overview: Elkhart, Indiana.  
Population 51,874.

Elkhart offers free devices, including low flow showerheads, sink aerators, and toilet water displacement devices, as well as free installation. The goal of the program is based on the number of installations with a target of 100 to 200 per year. The city partners with EnviroCorps, who helped develop the program. EnviroCorps annually receives grant funding from The Groundwater Foundation to assist in marketing the program and installing devices. Additionally, the city conducts public outreach using local media and public service announcements, providing conservation and pollution prevention information and tips for households.

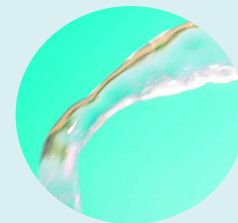
[www.elkhartindiana.org/](http://www.elkhartindiana.org/)

## Conservation in Action

Overview: Marin Municipal Water District, CA

MMWD offers residential customers no-interest loans of \$150 for purchase and installation of ultra low flush toilets, repayable through \$12.50 payments on bimonthly water bills. The program uses a voucher system. There is no limit on the number of toilet retrofits, and the program is open to all customer classes.

[www.marinwater.org/](http://www.marinwater.org/)



**5. FINANCING** – Unlike Cash Incentives, financing does not require a direct transfer of cash. Financing incentives help the customer purchase the more expensive conservation equipment by allowing payments over an extended period of time.

**6. NEW CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS** – New construction requirements can be a cost effective way of getting the public to participate in water conservation. It is much less expensive to install water conservation equipment during initial installation than to retrofit it in an existing building. Many incentives work, including cash incentives and financing, however, the target audience typically changes from the customer to the developer.