

2.2 Technical Assistance and Outreach

Applicability

Wholesale water providers in Texas serve several types of water users including municipalities of various sizes, water districts and corporations, and agricultural irrigation uses. This BMP is for wholesalers that want to partner with their customers jointly to meet both of their water conservation plan goals through the implementation of water conservation programs. The Technical Assistance and Outreach BMP is also for wholesale water providers that want to take an active role in assisting their customers and community with water conservation.

Description

Wholesale water providers interested in providing technical assistance to their customers have several options available including but not limited to the following items:

- Development of model water conservation plans and drought contingency plans that could be adopted by wholesale water provider customers. Smaller water providers may not have the staff, expertise, and/or resources to develop water conservation and drought contingency plans. Plus, many wholesale customers must have a plan that meets or exceeds requirements in the wholesaler's plan. Developing a set of model plans will allow wholesale customers to meet requirements set by state agencies, wholesale water providers, and other regulations.
- Assistance to customers developing their own water conservation plans and drought contingency plans. Wholesale water providers are required to develop and submit water conservation and drought contingency plans to state agencies for regulatory requirements. The information gathered and provided in these plans is often based on customer usage and data collected for planning and supply purposes. A wholesale provider should be able to provide assistance to a customer interested in developing their own plans in the form of data collection, historic use, estimated future demands, conservation goals, and much more based on data already collected.
- Development of water conservation outreach materials such as brochures, handouts, bill inserts, seasonal reminders, newsletter articles, and press releases. Having educational or informational materials available is a great way to reach customers. However, the development of these materials can be expensive and time consuming. A wholesale provider may be able to develop materials that are applicable to the entire service area and make them available to their customers. This method may also offer a reduced cost when printing in large quantities. The materials design, layout, and graphics may be made available in digital format to customers so they can personalize it with the city logo or other information specific to them and order quantities from the printer to meet their needs.
- Researching and providing advice on how to implement specific conservation programs or measures. Wholesale water providers with established water conservation goals cannot achieve those goals without coordinated efforts with their customers. To maximize efficiency and effectiveness of water conservation programs a wholesaler may develop a strategic plan outlining the best measures to be implemented—sort of a water conservation

road map. This may be done in-house or through a consulting agency experienced in planning, depending on the resources available. This type of strategic plan should include cost benefit analysis on various programs helping an entity determine if a program is feasible and appropriate for their customer base.

- Bulk purchasing. Having the ability to purchase items in large quantities can result in a cost savings per item. However, storage and distribution of bulk purchased items can be a challenge for some entities. Having these items purchased in large quantities at the wholesale level offers a lower cost and the ability to provide items to customers as requested.
- Training of customer employees to implement conservation programs such as irrigation evaluations, water audits, or other measures. Customer service should be the cornerstone of any utility. This is never more evident than when a customer complains about a high water bill. Often a visit to the home is necessary to resolve the dispute. Many times high usage is the result of irrigation system scheduling or malfunction. Having an employee that is able to perform an irrigation system checkup or evaluation for the customer can pay big dividends in customer education and service. Training does not have to be provided directly by the wholesaler. A wholesaler may choose to organize a training session for its customers in a central location utilizing industry individuals or academia (or possibly both) that are knowledgeable and experienced in teaching the subject.

Wholesale water providers interested in community outreach and education could explore getting involved through the following methods:

- Hosting workshops on specific conservation topics or issues. Many wholesale water providers around the state have been partnering with interest groups, stakeholders, other water providers, and more to develop and plan workshops, symposiums, and conferences to bring important topics related to water conservation to their customers. Using comments and recommendations gathered from customers can help steer the topics and shape the event so it is up to date and relevant to current issues. Using a planning committee can also help distribute some of the workload.
- Providing presentations and/or hosting booths at community events such as spring festivals, garden clubs, civic clubs, home and garden shows, school events, and homeowner association meetings. As attention toward water supply and meeting future needs increases people want to hear from their water provider about water supply planning activities. These types of public appearances not only provide valuable information to the public but also provide an opportunity for the wholesaler to tell their story, which the public may not know about.
- Conducting a region-wide media campaign. Wholesale water providers often have large service areas that include multiple counties and cities. These large areas may also share one television and radio media market. Instead of having competing messages saying similar things across the region, the wholesale provider may want to establish and manage one message for all its customers. This message should be developed and coordinated with the wholesale customers. Materials can also be developed or made available for customer use and branding with their own logo to meet specific outreach needs. Tarrant Regional Water District and Dallas Water Utilities have been sharing a water conservation outreach media

campaign since 2009, for example. Sharing the specifics of media campaign (creative, artwork for print and billboards, and media buying) has allowed the two entities to stretch their budgets and have good market coverage reaching several market segments.

Implementation

- Designate a water conservation staff person. A dedicated water conservation employee on staff with knowledge and expertise of customers and conservation programs can coordinate activities and programs as well as communicate with customers and other interested parties. Having a dedicated staff member provides a point of contact for both internal and external communications regarding water conservation.
- Have staff or other resources available with specific knowledge sets (i.e. licensed irrigator, inspector, creative and design) to provide technical assistance offered to customers.
- Consider hosting customer meetings two or three times per year to maintain contact with customers and discuss current items and future possibilities. If customer meetings are too large, consider establishing a customer committee that meets on a regular basis to explore new ideas for programs or address current issues and challenges.
- Maintain an up-to-date website containing water conservation information, a calendar of events, and other timely information that customers can link to and utilize for their own conservation programs.
- Make use of all the various social media platforms available today. Social media can take a lot of employee time when done correctly; however, social media allows a water provider to extend its education outreach messages well beyond standard types of messaging.
- Consider developing regional stakeholder and industry groups to address different issues and challenges of water use and demands. Using these groups helps when developing water conservation programs and drought contingency measures that are fair, equitable, and beneficial to all the customers.
- Develop conservation materials to present at customer board meetings, citizen advisory committees, home owner associations, and other interest groups regarding water conservation programs, benefits, and strategies.
- Develop water conservation partnerships with customers to implement programs, media campaigns, or other outreach activities.

Scope and Schedule

- Conduct a customer input process to determine the best mix of services which could include customer meetings or development of a customer task force.
- Include services in wholesale supplier conservation plan and link to water savings, where possible.
- Have plan adopted by wholesale water provider governing board to ensure management approval of services.
- Develop strategic work plan for how services are implemented, focusing on where there is either a need or customer request.

Measuring Implementation and Determining Water Savings

- Develop a tracking system to track technical assistance and outreach activities.
- Conduct yearly water conservation plan implementation surveys to monitor progress of individual customer plan implementation and to quantify water savings from implementation of customer programs where possible.

Cost-Effectiveness Considerations

- Number of staff depending on number of customers, size of service area, and level of implementation of water conservation programs.
- Purchase of water conservation materials for distribution; devices for promotional giveaways; and costs of hosting workshops, customer meetings, or other regional meetings.

Determination of the Impact on Other Resources

- This BMP complements other BMPs that wholesale water provider customers could implement.
- Wholesale water providers cannot generally reduce water use on their own and must save water through collaboration with customers and other water users.

References for Additional Information

- Tarrant Regional Water District Strategic Water Conservation Plan
- LCRA 2008 Water Conservation Task Force
- City of Austin Water Resource Planning Task Force
- City of Fort Worth Water Efficiency Stakeholders Committee
- San Antonio Water System
- Dallas Water Utilities

Acknowledgments

- Tarrant Regional Water District
- Lower Colorado River Authority