

Encouraging Water Efficiency

As a consequence of lawn watering, summer water use can rise 50% relative to other times of the year. In an effort to offset the cost of building a new water-processing plant, Durham Region, Ontario, developed a community-based social marketing strategy to reduce water use by 10% (Durham Region, 1997). Through survey techniques and direct observation, barriers to water-efficient lawn care were identified. Pilot households were divided into two groups. Householders in the first group were visited by a student employee on bicycle who spoke to residents about efficient water use. Although psychological knowledge was not used to shape the presentation of this information, residents were provided with a water gauge (one identified barrier was that residents were unaware of when they had watered their lawn adequately) and a prompt that was to be placed over the outside water faucet that reminded residents to water their lawn on either odd or even calendar days based upon their house numbers and to water their lawns only when it had not rained in the previous week. Further, these residents were asked to sign commitments that they would water their lawns only on odd or even days and that they would limit their watering to one inch per week (72% of those approached made these commitments). Meanwhile, those householders who were in the

“information only” condition were provided with an information packet on efficient water use. Compared to baseline measurements, observation of residents indicated that those householders who were visited by cyclists decreased watering by 54%, whereas those in the “information only” control group increased lawn watering by 15%. Further, watering lawns for longer than 1 hour decreased by 66% when householders were visited by a cyclist, whereas it increased by 96% in the other condition. In total, this program cost \$88 (Canadian) to deliver per household, for a total program cost of \$80,000. Durham Region calculates that the achieved reduction in peak water consumption allowed 250 new homes to be serviced with a savings in water plant development costs of \$945,000.