

Abstract #: 370

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**Abstract Title: Behavioral Water Efficiency – Drought Relief or a Way of Life?**

Abstract Text:

At the end of February 2015, the United States Drought Monitor map categorized 36% of the contiguous United States in moderate to exceptional drought. With many water utilities planning for drought conditions, it is critical that water utilities motivate residential customers to increase water-use efficiency. WaterSmart Software will share how utilities with any type of water meter can implement successful communication programs to customers that will reinforce drought messaging and drive persistent behavior change. WaterSmart generates custom Home Water Reports (HWR) and offers a web and mobile Portal for residential water users to track their water use. These reports use social norm based (SNB) behavioral psychology by comparing household consumption with similar sized homes and making personalized water savings recommendations. Other principles used to persistently save water are tunneling, suggestion, self-monitoring, surveillance and conditioning techniques. Through SNB our customer engagement programs have driven water savings between 3%-5% in as little as six months and since 2009 our company has saved over one billion gallons of water. While these savings have been shown to continue as long as customer continue to receive print or digital Home Water Reports through a web and mobile portal, the question of long-term water resource management and the ability to drive persistent water-saving behavior over time is still largely unknown. In addition to behavioral water efficiency, water utilities have an ongoing need to build stronger relationships with their customers through more comprehensive communication. The role that SNB approaches play in engaging customers and building more trusting partnerships will also be examined during this discussion. The presentation will address some key questions about whether behavioral water efficiency can be an effective tool outside of times of water stress. Since the SNB approach depends on a relative comparison to a similar peer group, as the peer group becomes increasingly water efficient what types of new techniques and messages are required to maintain conservation behaviors? During times of drought and public awareness of water stress, it is relatively easy to get the attention of water utilities and residential customers to engage in savings behavior, but in times of perceived water abundance how do these strategies and messages change? What level of understanding of the greater water cycle is required to embed conservation into the collective consciousness of a given community? This presentation will benefit practitioners who want to improve outreach strategies to reduce residential water demand, as well as those who want to increase two-way communications with customers.