

Rainwater harvesting offers hope for thirsty Texans

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The Lufkin Daily News

Saturday, December 09, 2006

Legislators next spring will consider recommendations encouraging Texans to tap into a significant untapped water source — rain.

"There is a significant untapped potential to generate additional water supplies in Texas through rainwater harvesting, particularly in urban and suburban areas," states the top key finding in a report, authorized by House Bill 2430 in the 79th session, submitted last week. "In most areas of the state, rainfall is sufficient to make rainwater harvesting a reliable and economical source of water even during short-term droughts."

And since it's harvested on site, plans for more and more complex water distribution systems are eliminated, the report states.

If just 10 percent of Dallas' roofs captured water, the water-hungry city could realize 2 billion gallons' worth of water annually. Statewide participation at the same level would conserve 38 billion gallons of water — possibly lessening the need for additional reservoirs. Rainwater harvest systems are capable of being used in conjunction with existing public water systems.

Rainwater harvesting would ease the pinch felt on public water supplies during peak usage in urban and suburban areas, thereby delaying need for expanding water treatment plants, and it would reduce storm water runoff, non-point source pollution, and erosion in urban environments.

"Rainwater is valued for its purity and softness and is generally superior for landscape purposes to most conventional public water supplies," the committee stated in their report "Rainwater Harvesting Potential and Guidelines for Texas" in which the four-member committee gives legislators 10 suggestions for statewide integration of rainwater harvesting integration. The report is available for public review online at www.twdb.state.tx.us/iwt/rainwater/docs/Rainwater/CommitteeFinalReport.pdf.

"The legislature should consider expanding the state's role in promoting rainwater harvesting," the committee states on page 2, offering 10 recommendations to help Texas realize this untapped water source.

New state facilities with at least 10,000 square feet should be required to incorporate rainwater harvesting systems into their design and construction for harvested water utilized in restroom facilities and landscape irrigation; and Texas should offer both residential and commercial incentive programs — backed by \$500,000 biennial funding through the Texas Water Development Board — encouraging implementation of rainwater harvest systems in new construction in the private sector.

The legislature should also direct the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and other state agencies to continue exempting homes with rainwater harvesting as their sole source of water supply from various water

quality regulations required of public water systems and instead provide the committees' guidelines as a resource for homeowners improving and maintaining the quality of rainwater for potable and non-potable indoor uses.

TCEQ and other state agencies should require facilities using both public water supplies and harvested rainwater for indoor purposes to have appropriate cross-connection safeguards, and use rainwater only for

non-potable indoor purposes.

The Legislature should appropriate \$250,000 to the Texas Department of State Health Services to conduct public health epidemiologic field and laboratory studies assessing pre- and post-treatment water quality from different types of rainwater harvesting systems in Texas for legislative feedback report in the 81st session.

Also, Texas cities should enact ordinances requiring permitting staff and building inspectors become more knowledgeable about rainwater harvesting systems, and allow such systems in homes and other buildings, when properly designed.

Committee participants represented TWDB, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Department of State Health Services, and the Texas Section of the American Water Works Association.

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