

Frisco offers rebate to residents using water-saving device

City to give \$100 for device that prevents excess sprinkler use

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Automatic sprinkler systems make for nice lawns, but they can be water hogs.

Frisco officials are offering a \$100 rebate to homeowners who install an electronic sprinkler control designed to automatically stop needless watering.

The devices range from about \$400 to \$1,000 but can reduce water use by 30 percent or more by preventing overwatering, said Gary Hartwell, Frisco director of public works.

"They should pay for themselves in the first year," he said.

The Frisco City Council, looking to conserve water, approved the water bill rebate this month. Frisco says it is the first Texas city to offer a monetary incentive to install an "evapotranspiration" device – commonly known as an ET controller.

They come in a variety of models and operate in different ways. They measure ground moisture, wind speed, humidity and temperature to determine when a lawn needs watering. If conditions aren't right, the control device will block a programmed sprinkler system from turning on.

In addition to receiving a \$100 water bill rebate, homeowners who install the device are exempt from some watering restrictions. For more than a year, Frisco residents have been limited to watering once a week because of the lingering drought.

Starting July 1, Frisco homeowners can water twice a week. But people with an ET controller can water on any day that the device determines the need, Mr. Hartwell said. However, they must abide by the city's watering prohibition from 5 to 8 a.m. and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Frisco has approved eight ET controllers – all made by different manufacturers – that qualify for the rebate. They can be purchased from local irrigation companies or over the Internet.

Half require a monthly subscription fee of \$4 to \$8, Mr. Hartwell said. Those models receive information from local weather stations.

The city has a description of the rebate program on its Web site, www.friscotexas.gov. Soon it will post a list of approved manufacturers and models, Mr. Hartwell said.

In the meantime, people can get the information by calling the public works department at 972-292-5800.

"The program is so new, people are just now starting to call in," Mr. Hartwell said. "We'll probably see the first rebates in the next two or three weeks."

The \$100 rebate will be offset by a \$25 annual registration fee. Homeowners who install an ET controller must immediately contact the city, Mr. Hartwell said.

"We'll have one of our licensed irrigators out to make sure the settings are correct and it is, indeed, operating as an ET controller," he said. "Then they'll get the \$100 rebate after that."

McKinney has considered a similar rebate program but decided against it, said Hal Cranor, public works director. He said he isn't sure homeowners would maintain the devices to make sure they're working properly.

"We can't even get people to check their sprinkler heads when they're blowing water straight up in the air," Mr. Cranor said.

Mr. Hartwell said he installed an ET controller on his home sprinkler system in March. He's sold on the device.

He said it has blocked his sprinkler system when the ground was wet from rain, when the temperature dipped below 40 degrees and when high winds would have blown the sprinkler spray onto concrete.

"It's pretty amazing," Mr. Hartwell said.