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## Water district to start conservation campaign

Board will spend \$250,000 to help promote methods to save water

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### DO YOUR PART

The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District will launch a public education campaign later this month to get the public to save water. Here are some successful efforts that were promoted by the North Texas Municipal Water District:

- Turn off a faucet while brushing teeth saves six gallons of water a day.
- Sweep your driveway instead of hosing down saves 80 gallons of water a day.
- Cut a 15 minute shower by half saves 43 gallons of water a day.
- Water your yard in early morning or late evening saves 25 gallons of water a day.

Source: North Texas Municipal Water District

### TRACKING WATER USAGE

Montgomery County relies on three underground aquifers for its water supply. Following is key data on the use of those aquifers.

- **Recharge rate (that which can be replenished annually through rainfall and runoff):** 64,000 acre feet\*
- **Current permitted amount that can be taken from three aquifers:** 77,000 acre feet\*
- **Number of permits in Montgomery County:** 798
- **Estimated number of wells:** 1,120

\* An acre foot is equal to 325,851 gallons.

Source: Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District

The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District has approved a \$250,000 public education campaign to promote water conservation in Montgomery County.

The district hired Enviromedia Social Marketing to develop an ad campaign that will include billboards, newspaper ads and water company bills to help spread its message of saving water to the public. The company was successful in a similar campaign to reduce the amount of water taken from underground aquifers in North Texas, despite a 20 percent growth in population in that area.

"It is a statewide recognized program that has highly successful," said Billy Woods, a member of the groundwater district and chairman of its water awareness and conservation committee.

The program, based on the Water IQ series developed by the state, provides quick, easy everyday tips to save water, like limiting shower times and turning off faucets while brushing teeth.

Montgomery County, which relies solely on underground aquifers for its water supply, is currently permitted to withdraw more water annually than can be recharged by the aquifer. The aquifer replenished about 64,000 acre feet a year through rainfall and runoff; Montgomery County permittees are authorized to take about 78,000 acre feet annually.

The county is under a mandate to reduce its reliance on underground water by 30 percent by 2015 and is requiring water companies to provide plans by early 2009 on how they plan to meet that goal. The water district also commissioned a study on the resources needed and the cost of piping water from Lake Conroe to other parts of the county.

The San Jacinto River Authority, a wholesale water supplier, owns one-third of the water rights to Lake Conroe. The city of Houston owns the other two-thirds.

The water district planned a large push in 2008 to enlist the public's help in water conservation. It had previously spent about \$70,000 a year on bill inserts, district mailings and rainwater harvesting projects, said Kathy Jones, general manager of the district.

The Water IQ campaign in North Texas is credited with curbing peak water use by about 200 million gallons a days, despite a 26 percent population increase in the area. That program was used by the North Texas Municipal Water District, the Lower Colorado River Authority, the cities of Austin and Lubbock, High Plains Underground Water Conservation District No. 1 and the Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District.

The local campaign will target about seven billboards in high use area, such as Interstate 45, U.S. 59, Texas 105 and FM 1097. Enviromedia estimates it would cost about \$100,000 to run the billboard campaign for three months in the summer. Water board member Sam Baker said that estimate is based on Houston billboard prices and that billboards in Montgomery County would cost 30 to 40 percent less, perhaps allowing the campaign to go for six months to a year.

The campaign will also include advertising in nine local newspapers in high use areas throughout the county. Finally, the district will make water bill inserts available to water providers in the county.

The campaign is expected to begin in late April and last for at least three months.

In addition to the advertising message, the campaign will include a community survey to gauge if residents know the source of their water. It also will include a measurement of the effect on water use.

The Montgomery county plan is designed to reduce peak day consumption, to raise awareness of water as a finite source, to educate consumers about issues related to water supply and planning in the county, and to establish a benchmark for measuring results.

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