

Smart Irrigation Controllers

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resource. Grass, plants and shrubs that get too much water can develop mold, fungus and disease.

Smart controllers combine a variety of technologies, including information transmitted by weather stations, satellites and sensors in the lawn, to decide whether to turn on the sprinkler system. The way it works differs from model to model, but the result is the same: the grass and landscaping get watered only when they need it, and only as much as is needed to stay healthy.

The controllers are gaining popularity in some western states, but will they work in Florida? That's what the pilot study aims to find out. The study, funded by Hillsborough County and being carried out by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at their research center in Balm,

is analyzing how well the controllers work in our soil and climate conditions, which model works the best, water use and landscape quality.

Soon, they'll be selecting homeowners to participate in a study to see what's more water efficient and better for the lawn at the same time -- following the water restrictions without using the smart controllers, or letting the watering time be determined by the controllers and not the restrictions.

"If these controllers prove to be effective, they will water on an as-needed basis instead of a schedule, and the studies out West have shown considerable water savings with that," said Norman Davis, the county's Water Conservation Manager.

"It's good for us, too," said IFAS researcher Michael Dukes. "As our landscape changes from rural to urban, this is information we need to know."

For more information about the project, call Davis at 274-6800, ext. 43305.

County Ranks Well In Annual Citizen Survey

Hillsborough County conducted its second annual countywide customer satisfaction survey a few months ago and the results are mostly improved over last year's ratings. With approximately 800 residents responding, 83% rated the value of county services overall as above average, and the average ratings of services improved 13% from last year.

Key areas that received improved ratings this year were affordable housing; county information; ease of travel; bicycle lanes; pedestrian safety; street repair; growth management services, programs and initiatives; code enforcement; and health care for the poor.

Residents also continue to rate library services; senior programs; animal control; law enforcement; fire; and emergency services all at above average percentages of 75% or more.

This survey is part of the County Commission's strategic plan for enhancing the county's public service in all of its 25 departments. Information gathered from these surveys will be used to make improvements to services and programs in Hillsborough County, and to hold county managers accountable for delivering quality customer service.

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For more information, call the Hillsborough Information Line at 272-5900, or visit the county's website at: www.hillsboroughcounty.org

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County Building Brandon Regional Service Center

Hillsborough County Commissioners and elected officials have broken ground on the long-anticipated Brandon Regional Service Center. Residents soon will no longer have to travel to downtown Tampa to access County services and programs. They can conveniently visit the Regional Service Center at 311 Pauls Drive, scheduled for completion by the end of this year.



Hillsborough County Commissioners, Constitutional Officers and representatives from the Brandon Chamber of Commerce break ground on the new Regional Service Center.

The \$4.2 million, 18,000-square-foot facility will be a local government center in the heart of Brandon where County departments, such as Planning & Growth Management and the Citizen Action Center will provide information and services. Water Resource Services will have a self-service kiosk. Satellite offices of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, Property Appraiser and the Sheriff will also

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Severe Water Shortage

The Southwest Florida Water Management District has declared our region to be in a severe water shortage, requiring all 16 counties in the district to limit watering of established lawns and landscaping to one day a week. SWFWMD made the declaration because every county in the district is experiencing some impact to water resources from the lack of rainfall in the past year.

Residents of unincorporated Hillsborough County have been following the once-a-week watering schedule since Dec. 16, following action by County Commissioners in response to a water shortage notice by Tampa Bay Water. All watering must be accomplished before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m. Reclaimed water customers are exempt from the restrictions; however, these customers are encouraged to use only what they need.

You may hand-water plants and shrubs, or use a drip irrigation system in landscaping beds, at any time. There are special rules for watering new sod.

The SWFWMD declaration includes rules for other water uses, as well:

- Car Washing - allowed once a week. At a residential property, on Tuesday or Saturday at addresses ending in even numbers, and Wednesday or Sunday at addresses ending in odd numbers. Use an automatic

When Can I Water?

It's easy to remember your new watering day. Just follow the guide below:

- Monday - addresses ending in 0 or 1
- Tuesday - addresses ending in 2 or 3
- Wednesday - addresses ending in 4 or 5
- Thursday - addresses ending in 6 or 7
- Friday - addresses ending in 8 or 9, locations with no address (common areas, entry areas), and locations with mixed addresses (office complexes, shopping centers).

Water before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m.

shut-off nozzle on the hose. Fund-raising car washes also are allowed.

- Pressure Washing - allowed in preparation for painting or other maintenance purposes, or for health and safety reasons.

- Decorative Fountains - fountains, waterfalls and other outdoor artistic water features are limited to operating eight hours a day. If the water feature also provides a water quality benefit, such as aerating a stormwater pond, it may be operated any hours as necessary.

- Recreational Use - reduce as much as possible. Take steps to limit the need for make-up water in pools, such as promptly repairing leaks and using a cover to reduce evaporation. Use recreational, sprinkler-like devices only at the times normally allowed for irrigation, and don't overwater the lawn. A wading pool, "Slip 'N Slide" or other child-oriented recreational device must run off or be emptied onto a lawn or landscape that requires irrigation.

The SWFWMD Severe Water Shortage rules are in effect until July 31, although that date could change if conditions improve or worsen.

For more information, visit www.hillsboroughcounty.org/water and click on the "Restrictions & Conservation" button, or call the Water Conservation Team at 274-6800 during regular business hours.

Brandon Service Center

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be on hand. Residents can stop by to receive zoning counseling, record documents with the Clerk of the Circuit Court, file for homestead exemption with the Property Appraiser's Office, or talk to a Community Resource Deputy. The building also will feature meeting rooms for county and community use.

The Center is the second of several multi-service facilities to open throughout the county. Funding also has been approved for similar facilities in Plant City and Town 'N Country.

How Smart Is Your Irrigation Controller?

Tucked in a vast pasture off a rural road in south Hillsborough County sit 20 identical miniature yards. Carefully placed shrubs cloaked with blue and yellow flowers sway in the breeze under the afternoon sun, keeping watch over grass planted in neat 40-by-25 foot plots.

Under way in this unassuming field is a first-of-its-kind study in Florida and what could very well be the future of residential irrigation systems: "smart" irrigation controllers.

Watering of established lawns and landscaping in Hillsborough County is allowed only on certain days. Despite advancements in weather forecasting, you can't always be sure if a predicted chance of rain is really going to happen. So, people tend to water their lawns on their assigned days whether or not it's needed. Also, most irrigation systems are controlled by timers, which homeowners set, then often forget about. Again, the grass gets watered even if it doesn't need it, and it gets the same amount of water each time.

Overwatering does more than waste a precious

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From left, County Water Conservation Manager Norman Davis, University of Florida graduate student Stacia Davis and Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences researcher Michael Dukes check out the condition of one of the study test plots using "smart" irrigation controllers.