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Sarasota County flushes excess water usage down the drain

The installation of nearly 300 water-free urinals throughout county facilities has saved about 13 million gallons of water from being flushed down the county's sewage stream, at a projected savings of \$92,500 in treatment costs. Conversion of the county's Central Energy Plant to reuse water will save another \$33,322 per year.

Both initiatives are part of an overall plan to conserve water, reduce water and sewage fees, and lower air-conditioning costs. The Central Energy Plant at 2078 Main St., Sarasota, provides chilled water to cool about 670,000 square feet of county buildings in a two-block area, including the Sarasota County Courthouse, Jail, Judicial Center and Terrace Building.

Earlier this year, air-conditioning cooling towers were converted from domestic water to reuse water, saving about 9 million gallons of drinking water a year. Patton says the \$48,000 conversion cost will be recouped in about year.

"People don't often equate water conservation with energy usage, but there's definitely a link, since water and sewer operations require a significant amount of energy," Gary Patton, Sarasota County Energy Coordinator, said.

Converting 282 county urinals to waterless urinals will eliminate water and sewer treatment fees for Sarasota, Venice, North Port and Englewood. To date, 163 of the urinals have been installed. Ninety-six will be installed later this year.

The water-free urinals use space-age technology developed by NASA for astronauts. A plastic seal allows liquids to pass through, while preventing sewer gas from backing up into the fixture. The fixture requires only routine cleaning.

The two initiatives have eliminated the use of more than 20 million gallons of drinking water per year in county facilities and are part of an ongoing plan to encourage water-saving technologies and strategies to conserve precious water resources.

"Sarasota County is setting an example in conserving water in buildings and landscapes," Patton said. "We have initiated numerous water-saving practices, from low-flow toilet fixtures, automatic faucets and flush valves and aerators that reduce faucet flow by 80 percent and shower head flows by 66 percent. Our landscapes consist of native plants and xeriscape principles and micro-irrigation."

To learn more about Sarasota County's energy and water conservation initiatives, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000.

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