

How to Prevent Runoff from Outdoor Irrigation

The majority of our water waste violations come from excessive runoff. Runoff is potable water that is wasted due to inefficient irrigation practices. This water is wasted by hitting our sidewalks, driveways, and streets while our sprinklers are watering our yards. It is also created by watering when it is windy out and watering with too much pressure in your system. Below are some tips on how to mitigate irrigation runoff:

Runoff Enemy #1 Low-head Drainage-When watering any area with an elevation change (even as little as one foot), all the leftover water in your underground pipes drains out through the lowest sprinkler head(s) on the line—every time you water. There are special sprinkler bodies you can buy that prevent water from flooding out of the sprinkler when the system turns off. They contain a check valve which prevents the water from coming out. These fixtures are inexpensive and can be found in most home improvement stores.

Runoff Enemy #2 Inefficient Sprinkler Nozzles- Inefficient sprinkler nozzles apply water too quickly for it to absorb into the soil. It pools up and goes right down to the street instead of nourishing your plants or grass. By switching out your conventional sprinkler nozzles with rotary nozzles, you can slow your water application rate by 75% and save 30% of water that would have been lost to runoff.

Runoff Enemy #3 Watering Too Fast-Clay soils, compacted lawns, and slopes require a special watering cycle. Runoff is usually caused by overwatering. Sometimes we think we're watering the right amount, but we're still creating runoff. This often happens because of special conditions that prevent all the water we are using from getting absorbed into the soil. Modify your watering schedule to employ the Cycle-Soak method. The Cycle-Soak method breaks up single, longer watering periods into several smaller periods, spaced out to allow water to absorb into the soil before you apply more. By allowing the water to infiltrate into the soil at the appropriate rate, you minimize runoff. For more information on the Cycle-Soak method, please visit the following website: <http://phys.org/news/2012-11-rest-experts-cycle-soak-lawns.html>.

The city is not exempt from this restriction. We, too have to comply with the outdoor water use schedule but sometimes we do not know when the overspray or runoff is occurring. City staff is preparing to turn the sprinklers back on from a five month break. If you see overspray, excessive irrigation runoff, or broken sprinkler heads, please call Public Works at (209) 895-8060 during business hours or (209) 895-8000 (option 9) after business hours.

