

# Learn to save water Saturday in Merrimack

◆ **Exhibits:** Children will find activities, too.

By **DAN McLEAN**  
Union Leader Correspondent

**MERRIMACK** — On Saturday morning, the Merrimack Village District Water Works will host a forum to encourage residents to conserve water through pragmatic landscaping.

Assisted by a \$14,765 grant from the Department of Environmental Services, the town's water company will begin a public education campaign to keep water usage from outpacing supply.

The Merrimack Village District Water Works free workshop, titled "Get Water Smart Landscaping and Lawn Care," on Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon. The workshop will be held at Radisson Hotel in Merrimack. Activities and exhibits for children will be provided.

According to Brian Wilson, superintendent of the Merrimack Village District, proper landscaping can save substantial amounts of water as well as limit the amount of pesticide and fertilizer spread on lawns.

According to Paul Susca, a DES environmental program manager, the "sprawl type developments" in Merrimack and other towns in southern New Hampshire are creating higher demands for water.

"I don't think these concerns extend to the whole state yet," he said.

The local water company, which is technically a separate municipality and not a part of Merrimack town government, has 6,453 metered customers and a maximum capacity of 6.2 million gallons a day, Wilson said.

If no water management controls were instituted during the peak usage months of July and August, Wilson said, the town would exceed the 6.2 million gallon limit and start drawing upon reserves — which could quickly lead to an emergency situation.

The town has a four million gallon and a two million gallon reserve tank.

"As we have more and more build-out and more and more people, we will start seeing more and more problems," warned Allan Fuller, chairman of the Pennichuck Watershed Council.

"This (workshop) is obviously being done because there is an education process required," Fuller said. "They see at some point in time where demand will be beyond supply."

Merrimack requires the alternation of lawn watering between even and odd numbered homes. With the plan in effect, 4.5 million gallons a day are used during peak months. "We're fine with my management plan in place," Wilson said.

In off-peak periods, roughly two million gallons are used a day, Wilson said.

"There are days when the demand is excessive. But we have never been in a point

where we're not going to have enough water for everyone to use. We watch it that close," said Jill Vacchiano, Merrimack Village District spokesman.

"There will come a point when it will be difficult to add more people without adding more restrictions on water usage," Fuller said, noting that odd-even watering system is a form of water rationing.

The best way to conserve water is to get residents to change what is planted in their yards, Wilson said. And that is what will be taught on Saturday morning.

Kentucky Blue Grass is a popular grass in southern New Hampshire, he said, adding that it requires a lot of water to grow.

"It belongs growing in Kentucky. You need to grow New Hampshire native grasses," he said, later adding that it is "absolutely absurd" for residents to pump more than two million gallons more a month during July and August than during the rest of the year.

Instead of large lawns, Wilson said residents should have more bushes, shrubs, and trees.

"Don't try to change landscaping, just accept it," he said. "The attitude needs to change and we'll do it piece by piece. And some people will never change."

Residents are better off giving yards "one good soaking a week" instead every day, Susca said, explaining that it creates deeper root growth.

On Sept. 3, the Pennichuck Watershed Council chairman wrote an email stating "Merrimack Village district is trying to conserve water usage in part because their supply can not meet demand."

The district denied the assertion.

"That is just flat-cold wrong," Vacchiano said.

Yesterday, Fuller toned down his statements, acknowledging that the water district had a cushion during peak months. Holding the workshop, he said, is proactive and a "wise thing to do."

Eileen Pannetier of Comprehensive Environmental Inc., who is often hired to conduct studies for the district, responded to Fuller in a Sept. 4 e-mail, stating the purpose of the workshop is to address lawn watering that is "becoming a strain on supplies and the environment throughout southern New England."

People use large quantities of water combined with fertilizers and pesticides, creating pollution of surface and ground water that pollutes private wells, she said.

The "huge quantities" of water create "excessive summer peak demands on water supplies."

Housing developers clear cut trees and remove top soil for off-site sales, creating property that has no shade and insufficient topsoil to support lawns, Pannetier wrote. "This is a recipe for high water demand."

# Communities face deadline for US rules on storm runoff

By James L. Franklin  
GLOBE STAFF

There are 171 cities and towns in Massachusetts, including 22 locally, that must comply with new storm water rules released this year by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

As a result, even some comparatively small towns that are near more urbanized areas must prepare a detailed plan for dealing with illegal sewer connections and curbing the runoff from streets and parking lots by the time the rules take full effect in 2003.

"Initially, it shouldn't cost a great deal of money," said Eileen Pannetier, president of Comprehensive Environmental Inc., a Dedham-based consulting firm.

But for communities that are already under court orders because of water-related environmental problems and are situated near sensitive water sources, the new rules could be much more expensive. In some cases, once they take full effect, the rules would require treatment of runoff from new or redesigned streets and other impervious surfaces.

Pannetier's firm, the Charles River Watershed Association, and the environmental studies program of Brandeis University in Waltham will be cosponsoring a workshop for local officials Tuesday at the university.

A handful of communities are already dealing with the rules, formally called Phase 2 Stormwater Regulations, but many others are just learning that they must comply with the regulations.

The preliminary list of towns was published in the Federal Register, based on US Census definitions of urbanized areas from the 1990 census. Currently, the affected towns locally are:

Acton, Andover, Arlington, Bedford, Belmont,  
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