



## Dialing in irrigation controllers keeps turf healthy, saves water

An irrigation system's overall efficiency is directly related to how well its controller system is adjusted. If the systems under your care are not properly scheduled, water waste and inferior appearance of turf and landscaped areas are an almost sure bet.

Studies have shown that landscapes (fairways and greens) are overwatered by 30 to 50 percent. The question then becomes: How can water be conserved while at the same time maintaining a healthy, green course? What methods do the pros use to fine-tune controller programs?

The answer can be found in the "Triple A" approach: Anticipate. Adjust. Achieve.

### Anticipate

Begin by forecasting seasonal weather changes as they act as your "early warning" system. Obtain historical evapotranspiration data for your area and mark your calendar. Your central control system, almanacs and local agricultural resources also can provide weather estimation on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Because the greatest water savings occur from monthly programming adjustments, examine the data and set a scheduling interval.

Utilize that data in conjunction with some of these tricks of the trade:

- **Know when to "peak-up."** Don't play catch-up with hot weather. Prevention of dry spots conserves more water than reacting too late, attempting to make up for turf stress.

- **Know when to "dip-down."** Likewise, anticipate cooler weather.

- **Establish schedules.** Create winter and summer schedules. Set start and run times with future water budget (by percentage) tuning in mind. Generate the schedule during the off-season. Keep notes from the previous season and revise the schedule as needed.

- **Label each zone.** Note the station, or zone information, on a programming worksheet or card. Most manufacturers supply these with the controller. Give a copy to your course's crew, along with a brief explanation to eliminate any confusion or scheduling conflicts.

### Adjust

Modify the irrigation schedule as needed, adding watering days or station run times prior to known, yet unscheduled, peaks in temperature. Use "water budget" functions to make quick, global adjustments to your schedules. This is a fast, effective way to fine-tune the sys-



The key to a good watering program is in the "Triple A" approach: Anticipate, adjust and achieve. Photo courtesy of Rain Bird

tem without the hassle of reprogramming every station.

Water budget functions can increase or decrease the run times of all stations on a program by a selected percentage, say 0 percent to 300 percent. For example, the base schedule during summer may call for a 15-minute run time, twice a day in July. Set the water budget to 80 percent on Sept. 1. The cumulative run time will decrease to 24 minutes total. If the zone demands 15 gallons per minute, you save 90 gallons a day on just that zone, not to mention the other stations on that program.

### Achieve

The benefits of fine-tuning controllers are wide-ranging. Not only does it conserve water, it also shows competence and consideration on the part of the superintendent. By not overwatering, grass clippings are reduced, plants are healthier and maintenance becomes easier.

**GCM**

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## NEWS & notes

A six-person panel discussed water conservation initiatives and strategies at the fifth annual Intelligent Use of Water Summit, held in Pasadena, Calif., and sponsored by Rain Bird Corp. Scholars, designers, municipal directors and business owners formed the panel, which examined the roles of lawmakers, corporations and citizens in averting a global water crisis. The group called on local, national and international leaders to implement regulations and strategies for water conservation. The Intelligent Use of Water Summit occurred shortly after the U.N. released a report predicting an eminent global water shortage by 2025. The next summit is scheduled for this summer.

After its inaugural Smart Irrigation Month last year, the Irrigation Association is bulking up its 2007 campaign to take a stronger irrigation efficiency message to consumers. Additional resources from the association include its Web site, [www.smartirrigationmonth.com](http://www.smartirrigationmonth.com), which features ideas on how to participate, consumer-oriented articles on irrigation efficiency and a brochure of irrigation tips. New resources will be added to the site between now and Smart Irrigation Month in July, such as public service announcements to submit to local media, sample advertisements and press release templates.



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