

Is too much fresh water used to water Florida lawns?

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Wasting fresh water is a real concern. A recent study conducted with homeowners in central Florida found that, on average, 64 percent of the drinking water used by homes went to irrigation. In the summer months, this percentage increased to 88 percent. As the population increases, conservation of fresh water becomes increasingly important.

The Special Issue Section of the current *Technology and Innovation - [Journal of the National Academy of Inventors](#)* focuses on challenges to [fresh water](#) from environmental changes and from the human population.

Florida homeowners—ready and willing to comply with government agency-imposed lawn watering restrictions—want to conserve water, although many are confused about how to conserve water. At the same time, many homeowners are also required to have perfect, green lawns or risk being penalized by their Home Owner's Associations (HOAs).

What is a homeowner to do?

In a study entitled "It's Going to Take More Innovation than Technology to Increase Water Conservation Practices," researchers from the University of Florida examined the perceptions of homeowners in Orange County, Florida who have automated irrigation systems and looked deeply into their [water conservation](#) knowledge and practices.

"The purpose of [our] study was to examine the perceptions of

homeowners...who have automated [irrigation systems](#) [about] the use of norms that could be employed to reduce water used for lawn care," said study co-author Liz Felter of the University of Florida.

The researchers also looked at the role of "social marketing" efforts to encourage people to conserve water, the barriers to water conservation, and how peer pressure might be involved in successfully implementing [water conservation measures](#). They wanted to know what barriers might exist to increasing water conservation even when community- based social marketing (CBSM) was employed to encourage conservation.

The researchers used focus groups comprising homeowners who answered questions and participated in discussions. Focus group participants were asked to describe how they watered their lawns and what conservation practices they currently utilized.

In evaluating the barriers to conservation, the researchers found that several themes emerged from these discussions. "One of the major themes to emerge from the [focus groups](#) was a lack of knowledge on how to care for the grass," explained Felter. Some sub-themes included confusion about watering restriction days, an inability to use the timer correctly, and pressure from the HOA to water excessively to achieve perfect grass.

In evaluating norms of water use, a major theme was a desire on the part of the homeowners to abide by the watering restrictions. This theme was counterpoint to not wanting to risk being penalized by their HOA if their lawns were not "perfect."

Emerging from this study is the conclusion that "the largest barrier [to conservation], pressure from the HOA to have perfect grass by watering excessively, will have to be addressed." They note that, "even with the proper information and the ability to perform the new skills needed to

reduce their water use, participants were concerned about repercussions from the HOA."

In response to this dilemma, the researchers suggested that state water regulation officials and HOA representatives meet to help with planning future water needs and use. They also concluded that community-based [social marketing](#) is a good approach for encouraging residents to increase their [water conservation practices](#).

Provided by University of South Florida

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