

By Amanda Baillie

Local residents and businesses are being invited to participate in a new effort to save water and protect the San Pedro River.

The Cochise Water Project (TCWP) is launching its latest program to encourage area citizens to cut down on the amount of water they use for landscaping.

The Sierra Vista-based non-profit is offering 600 smart irrigation controllers, at no cost to the public, which it believes will reduce the recipient's landscaping water usage by up to 20 per cent.

Unlike conventional controllers, which water plants according to the times that have been set, the smart devices irrigate only when needed.

Each controller is connected to its owner's irrigation system and wireless Internet service, and receives information from local weather stations regarding meteorological conditions.

In other words, if it has been raining recently, the controller knows that it is not necessary to water the plants.

Tim Cervantes, TCWP administrative director, has been virtually testing one of the Hydrowise smart controllers for more than three months.

"We set it up to water a virtual landscape with different zones, like grass, a front yard, and trees, and we have seen a 20 percent reduction in the amount of water that would normally be used," he said.

In the last 12 months TCWP has installed 12 weather stations throughout the Sierra Vista sub watershed.

Anyone who installs a smart controller will receive information from the nearest weather station, which will be located within two miles of their home or business.

"That's important because we know from these weather stations that there are dramatic differences in climate conditions in different sections of the sub watershed," said Cervantes. "That means your controller will be fine tuned with your nearest weather station for the most accurate information."

Local landscaping company Southwest Desert Images will install the controllers at no charge, thanks to a grant from TCWP.

Those who take advantage of the program will have their existing timers replaced, and they must have a wireless Internet connection.

"We want to stress that there are no security issues," said Cervantes. "There will be no sharing of private information and the controllers do not have the ability to access your information."

Last year TCWP installed a smart irrigation system at Pueblo Del Sol Golf Course, where water use has been reduced by 10 percent.

"They are now shooting for 20 percent," Cervantes added.

Founded five years ago, TCWP's sole mission is to reduce the amount of groundwater used in the sub watershed by encouraging residents and business owners to decrease their water use.

The projects it carried out in 2015 alone will save an estimated 158 million gallons annually, and that number will rise by the end of this year.

"We have seen great success with our toilet rebate program, as well as our rainwater harvesting and artificial turf programs," said Cervantes. "If 600

households and businesses sign up for a free controller, that will only serve to save more water and help us meet our mission to protect the San Pedro River.

“Thanks to so many people being able to play their part, Sierra Vista is truly a model for other communities looking for innovative ways to save water.”

The controllers will be installed on a first come first served basis. Anyone interested in having a smart controller installed should email Southwest Desert Images at [swdesertimages@gmail.com](mailto:swdesertimages@gmail.com)