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Water report: Sip, don't gulp

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Evanston aldermen will get a water conservation report tonight that – among other things – calls for removing bottled water from vending machines in city buildings.

The 52-page report, developed under a federal grant that provided technical assistance from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, also calls for other efforts to promote the use of tap water for drinking.

But at the same time, it calls for reducing overall tap water use by installing low-flush toilets and reducing lawn watering.

Amy Talbot, an associate planner with CMAP who worked on the report, says that despite conservation efforts, the price of water will probably continue to go up, here and throughout the country.

That's because, she says, aging water system infrastructure needs to be replaced.

And, if trends toward decreased water use per capita continue, cities will have to charge more for each unit of water they pump to cover operating and capital costs.

Talbot says some changes to promote water conservation could be pretty simple. For example, the report suggests the city could make the amount of water residents consume more obvious by changing water bills to express usage in gallons, rather than cubic feet.

"Everybody has a sense of how much a gallon is," Talbot says, but they don't have a sense of how much water is in a cubic foot.

The report suggests that, longer term, the city could consider offering rebate programs to encourage installation of low-flow toilets.

Since 1992 federal law has required that all new and replacement toilets use 1.6 gallons of water or less per flush, compared with a typical 3.5 gallons for older models.

But Talbot says the newest [Water Sense toilets](#) use 20 percent less water than the legal limit.

Talbot says many residents now over-water their lawns – which actually weakens lawns by encouraging the development of shallow root systems.

Using a rain gauge can help determine the right amount of water to use, and switching to native plant species that require less water can lead to further savings, she says.