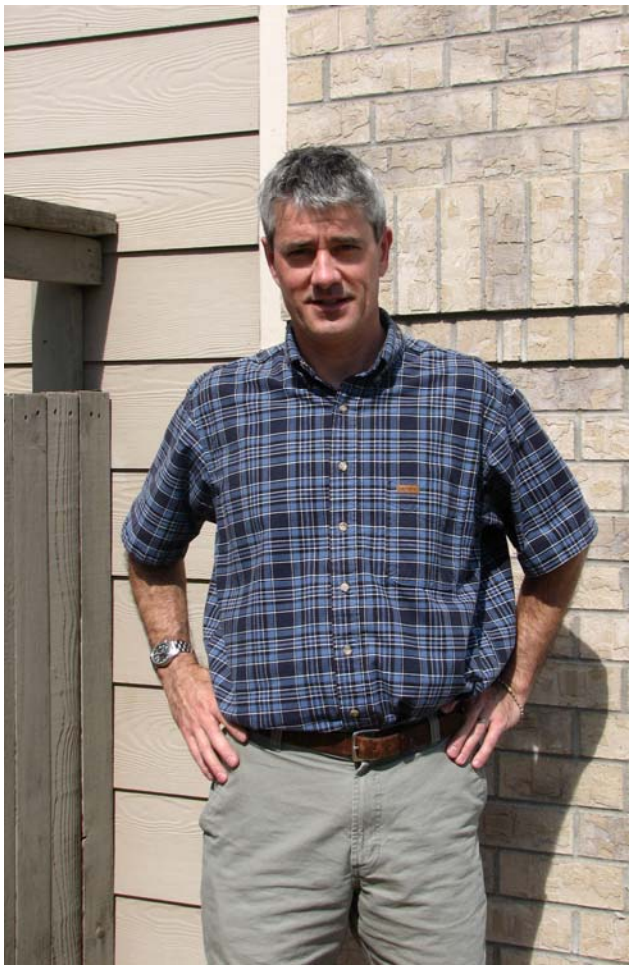
Saving Water at the Regans

By Jeff Woodward



"The yard is not my thing, ok? It's not at all my thing," explains Mike Regan of Lafayette. "I want to do the least amount of work and get the most out of it. I have enough time to do what needs to be done, but I only want to do what really NEEDS to be done."

Regan, father of four and employed at Pearl Izumi, doesn't have much time to spend on his lawn. "I'm a busy guy…" he says, "my kids take up most of my free time, and what little is left I'd much rather spend on a bike ride." However he has recently made small fixes to his sprinkler system that *"make my lawn twice as green with half as much water."*

Regan was intrigued when he heard about the free Slow the Flow Irrigation Inspections offered by the Center for ReSource Conservation (CRC) (www.ConservationCenter.org)

in partnership with the City of Lafayette. "I'll spend the time to fix the problems, but [I] don't have the time or expertise to diagnose [them]."

After Regan called the CRC, an inspector named Joe Simpson came out to spend 2 hours with him in his yard. "Joe seemed very thorough, and offered a lot of helpful advice," recalled Regan. At the end of the inspection, Joe gave Mike three recommendations: change his watering schedule to incorporate a technique called 'cycling,' change some nozzles and straighten some heads to water more evenly, and reduce the pressure on his sprinkler system.

Regan got started right away. The next weekend he reprogrammed his controller with a new watering schedule, and took a trip to his local hardware store. First, he bought about $15 in nozzles and $5 in riser extensions. He later came back and spent another $25 on a pressure reducer.

Due to clay soil in Regan's yard, Joe had recommended a watering technique called 'cycling.' Clay absorbs water slowly and water that is not readily absorbed simply runs off. Now Mike runs his system twice a week for 3 short cycles instead of one long one, with each cycle separated by an hour for the water to soak in.

"[After the audit], I was getting fantastic results with 3 cycles of 5 minutes." Cycling helped reduce the water that ran off onto the side of his yard and the sidewalk, and cut down on the number of weeds that grew on the side of his yard.

Next, Regan got to work fixing his sprinkler heads. He raised his sprinkler heads that weren't reaching above the grass, and straightened the heads that were tilted.. He installed Variable-Arc-Nozzles ('VANs') on all of his heads, which allowed him to adjust the arc of sprinklers to fit the curved corners of his yard. "Before the [VANs], I had to water lots and lots and lots in the back yard to keep it green," he says. *"Now I've cut the water use back there by over 50%, and it looks better than it ever has."*

Mike made one final change: he installed a pressure reducer on his sprinkler system. His sprinkler heads were operating at too high of pressure which caused the water droplets to turn into a fine mist. This fine mist evaporates quickly and is easily blown away by the slightest breeze, which ultimately translates into less water actually reaching the grass.

After his inspection identified his problems, Regan found the fixes were fairly easy. "Everybody's got other stuff to do," he says, "[the inspection] let me do it in the least amount of time, [spending] the least amount of money. Fixing the problems took about two to three hours, and I spent about $50. I've already made back my investment." His lawn now uses about 45% less water than it did before his inspection.

After making his changes, Regan keeps a close eye on his system for problems. He offers one piece of advice to other homeowners: "If your rocks are wet, you're doing something wrong."

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Free Irrigation Inspections are available through the Center for ReSource Conservation to residents of 13 water providers across the Front Range, including Boulder, Lafayette, Longmont, Erie and Superior. To request an inspection or to see if you are eligible, visit www.ConservationCenter.org or call 303-441-3278 x 17.