

Teaching Water-Wise Ways

District 10 Training Center Focuses on Landscape Maintenance in a Safe Setting

Although the drought has been washed away in California this year, Caltrans hasn't eased up on its commitment to save water. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Stockton, where Maintenance Division staff operate a training center where workers tackle different repair scenarios and learn sustainable landscape practices.

Located at Caltrans' District 10 office, the planted and mulched training grounds are irrigated through a new-generation control center. Drawing water from an underground cistern filled with rainwater runoff demonstrates how nonpotable water can safely keep roadside planted areas green.

It's all part of Caltrans' effort to sharply cut water use on its irrigated acreage throughout the state. Although it has practiced water conservation for decades, the department stepped up its conservation commitment several years ago as drought conditions intensified. With the situation increasingly dire in early 2015, Caltrans Director Malcolm Dougherty called for the department to reduce its water use by 50 percent from 2013 totals. (See accompanying story.)

District 10 maintains 121 irrigation control centers to deliver water to landscaped roadside areas along state highways between Merced and Lodi, the southern and northern limits of the district.



District 10's landscape training center features different zones where new equipment is tested and irrigation repair scenarios presented.

The controllers can be set or monitored using smartphones or tablets. District staff can view the amount of water use at each landscaped site and quickly see when and where any excess is occurring. The information from each controller is transmitted to a hub, which feeds water usage details into a database.

The district's water use fell from about 81.7 million gallons in fiscal year 2014-15 (July 1-June 30) to 67.1 million gallons in FY 2015-16. Usage did rise to 84.5 million gallons in FY 2016-17, but more irrigated landscape acreage was added in the Modesto and Stockton areas.

This modernization of irrigation systems statewide reflects the department's commitment to efficiency and stewardship of the resources it manages, as outlined in the 2015-2020 [Strategic Management Plan](#) (SMP). In District 10's case, the establishment of a training center also affirms Caltrans' No. 1 goal listed in the SMP: the safety of its workers. Landscape employees are now able to learn how to operate irrigation systems in a safe environment, away from traffic hazards that are always present when working in the field. ■



Caltrans photos by Steven Hellon

A new generation irrigation controller makes the job of setting, and tracking water use in planted areas much more precise.

Sources: District 10: Kent Kibble, Maintenance Manager; Russ T. Lake, Assistant Resident Engineer; John Spithorst, District Landscape Specialist.