**WEB**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Urban Water Program Director**

**Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources**

**“What is ‘lost water?’”**

The Edwards Aquifer Regional Water Conservation Program is sponsoring a Lost Water Conference Oct. 30 in San Antonio for staff of municipal water utilities and other water suppliers in the Edwards Aquifer region.

The conference will be from 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. at the Edwards Aquifer Authority offices, 900 E. Quincy St. in San Antonio.

The conference targets small and medium water company officials, but gardeners and other ratepayers who want to learn about this important water conservation opportunity are welcome. The conference will cover how to calculate, determine the causes and correct the problems of lost water. Funds and expert assistance are available to communities in the region that want to reduce their lost water.

We have discussed water conservation in this column many times in the last 25 years, but I don’t think we have every talked about “lost water.”

In simplest terms, lost water, also called non-revenue water, is the difference between the water a community pumps from the Edwards Aquifer and the water that is accounted for by being sold to a household or business.

The fact that such a difference exists means that your water purveyor is paying fees and electricity to pump water that is never sold.

Lost water in a typical water system amounts to about 6 percent to 30 percent of the total water pumped. Because this amount is significant, water purveyors, the Edwards Aquifer Authority and Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) are directing more attention to lost water.

It is expected that TWDB will require any community with a lost water rate greater than 15 percent to address the problem as part of access to the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT) or other TWDB water resource funding. As citizens, we also need to encourage our water companies to reduce lost water.

In the Edwards Aquifer region municipalities and industrial users pump approximately 280,000 acre-feet of water every year. Here, an average of 15 percent lost water would equal about 42,000 acre-feet of water worth over $42 million every year.

Just reducing lost water from 15 percent to 10 percent in the Edwards Aquifer Region would save 14,000 acre-feet of water every year. Since 1 acre-foot equals 325,851 gallons, 4.5 billion gallons of water could be added to our available water supply each year. That is a lot of lawn, flower and vegetable irrigations!

The most obvious cause of lost water is leaks in the distribution system due to old and damaged pipes and pumps. Other causes include inaccurate metering, non-metered water use, stolen water and poor accounting. Some necessary activities such as firefighting and pipeline flushing are beneficial water uses that are not measured but probably should be.

Determining and correcting the causes of lost water is both a moral and economic issue. Nobody thinks that wasting water is desirable. If eliminating the cause of the loss will save the community money or increase revenues, it really becomes imperative to solve the problem.

For questions about the “Lost Water Conference” contact me, Calvin Finch, at 210 277 0292 ext. 207 or at [calvin.finch@tamu.edu](mailto:calvin.finch@tamu.edu). To RSVP, contact Amy Truong by Oct. 27. 210-227-0292 ext. 205.

**“Garden Tasks”**

* Now is the time to plant trees and shrubs. For evergreen trees, consider Arizona cypress, Aleppo pine, Italian stone pine or Japanese black pine.
* In the vegetable garden, plant lettuce, carrots, radish, turnips, rutabagas, mustard, beets and spinach by seed. Plant broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower transplants.
* Collect pecans as quickly as you can after they fall from the tree. Refrigerate or freeze them to maintain quality.
* Incorporate 2 inches of compost into your raised bed to improve soil structure and drainage. Fertilize with 1 cup of winterizer or slow release lawn fertilizer for every 100 square feet of bed.