

Local Website Displays Home Water Use, Makes Conservation Rewarding

Milwaukee, WI – Have you ever been confused by your water bill, or wondered if the amount of water your home used was normal for your area? H2Oscore.com, a website developed by Marquette University Professor McGee Young, aims to answer those questions by providing everyone who pays a water bill in Milwaukee an online display of their home's water use. The service is provided at no cost to residential users. Homeowners can activate their displays from the H2Oscore.com homepage by entering their City water bill number (a link is provided on the site to look your number up online), then choosing a personal username and password. Clicking on a link included in a confirmation email completes the set-up process.

The effort to build the website began in 2011 after Young attended meetings of the Milwaukee Water Council, and learned of the efforts City and business leaders were making to build community-wide appreciation for the region's unique freshwater resources. Since then a collaborative effort between Young, the Milwaukee Water Works, as well as students and faculty at Marquette, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, resulted in the service becoming available to Milwaukee residents last month.

“With H2Oscore we've tried to show people their home's water use in simple and meaningful ways so that they can not only make more informed decisions about reducing their use, but also more easily tell if those efforts are really making a difference,” says Young. Along with calculating a home's water use in gallons per day, neighborhood comparison and rank features against the average use of homes within a 1/4 mile radius attempt to tap into our natural curiosity for social comparison and perhaps a bit of friendly competition.



An additional “rewards” feature allows homeowners who have reduced their water use to receive in-store credit at a host of local businesses, who themselves have a demonstrated commitment to environmental sustainability. The list of businesses who have so far stepped forward to participate include East Side Pilates, La Merenda Restaurant, Great Lakes Distillery, Café Hollander, Groom Hair Salon, IndustriCafe, among others. While Young says there's been a lot of support from businesses in the Walker's Point and Downer Avenue neighborhoods, he hopes to add businesses through out the city, “We want residents to be able to join in this effort with businesses close to home,” he says. A complete list of all the businesses offering rewards is constantly updated on the website. H2Oscore expects the first homeowners to begin receiving and redeeming their rewards in January.

With the site up and running, Young and his team have reached out to neighborhood groups to help make residents aware of the service. In its first few weeks, neighborhoods around Bay View, the East Side and Washington Park areas have seen the highest numbers of sign-ups. “I think there is an understanding that residents in neighborhoods with many older homes could especially benefit from the site since there is a higher chance those homes contain older, less water efficient, plumbing fixtures and undetected leaks,” says Young. An article about the initiative in the Milwaukee Business Journal also helped lead to some initial sign-ups across the City.

Milwaukee Homes with H2Oscore.com Accounts
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Homeowners are encouraged to give their feedback on the site, as the group hopes to improve its functionality as plans move forward to make H2Oscore available next in Madison and Waukesha.

707 N 11th Street, Suite 422, Milwaukee, WI 53233 | Contact@h2oscore.com | 414-759-2599

