

Save Water - Earn Green Points

Only 3 percent of all water on earth is fresh, and 2 percent of that is frozen in icecaps and glaciers. Selecting low-flow fixtures and low-flush toilets will help preserve this most precious resource and provide points toward the Florida Green Building Coalition, the National Association of Home Builders Green Guidelines, and the Florida Water Star certification programs. Low-flow fixtures use less than the standard 2.2 (sink faucet) or 2.5 (showerhead) gallons per minute (gpm) and are offered by many companies. Dual-flush and low-flush commodes are also readily available.

In the past, some low-flow fixtures provided less-than-acceptable performance. Today, technological advances incorporated into the majority of these fixtures allow them to provide a “standard” shower- or sink/lavatory-use experience.

To make it easy to find and select water-efficient products with good performance, the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) has introduced its WaterSense® program, a label that’s backed by independent testing and certification. WaterSense® labeled products perform their intended functions as well as or better than their less-efficient counterparts. And generally speaking, they’re about 20 percent more water-efficient. For a list of qualified low-flow products, including toilets, bathroom sink faucets, showerheads, and weather- or sensor-based irrigation technologies, visit <http://www.epa.gov/watersense/>.

Here are some examples to give you an idea of what’s available.

Lavatory Faucets: One of the major plumbing-fixture suppliers had a hands-on display of lavatory faucets at the recent International Builders’ Show here in Orlando. Attendees had an opportunity to test low-flow lavatory faucets in person, and they really *do* feel just like their 2.2-gpm counterparts. I think the only difference homeowners will notice is the difference in the water bill.

Showerheads: When using the latest low-flow showerheads, there’s no need to run around in the shower just to get wet. New technology infuses more oxygen into the water, which allows these fixtures to provide a normal shower experience. Two additional ways to save water in the shower: reduce shower time and include only one showerhead in each shower. FGBC awards one point if all showers are equipped with only one head.

Low-Flush Commodes: Ever since the Energy Policy Act of 1992, toilets in the U.S. have been regulated at 1.6 gallons per flush (gpf). Even so, it’s

estimated that as much as 20 percent of our household water bill goes right down the toilet—pun intended.

Want to take a chunk out of that statistic and help the environment at the same time? Consider one of the new, low-flush models that uses 1.28 gallons per flush (gpf) or less. Kohler Co. estimates that a 1.28-gpf commode can save up to 3,200 gallons of water per fixture per year.

Dual-Flush Commodes: This technology seems new to us, but dual-flush toilets have been used for many years in Europe, Asia, and Australia. The U.S. is definitely behind the times when it comes to water conservation.

Dual-flush commodes usually feature two buttons on the top of the tank. One is used for flushing liquids at .8 or .9 gpf; the second is used for solids at the normal 1.6 gpf.

Because liquids are flushed much more frequently than solids, dual-flush technology has the potential to save a family of four up to an amazing 10,000 gallons of water per year per fixture. That's a savings great enough to pay for the fixture in just a few years. And of course, the savings continue for years to come.

Today we have the ability to conserve water without sacrificing either aesthetics or comfort. As you make your plumbing-fixture selections for your next green home, take a serious look at low-flow. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.