

Data and Apps Combine to Exceed Water Conservation Goals

Rancho California Water District Leverages Data to Achieve Monthly Baseline Savings Ranging From 22-42 Percent

OVERVIEW

Based in Southern California, the Rancho California Water District (RCWD) serves a diverse mix of 44,000 commercial and residential customers. As the state of California entered its fourth year of drought in 2015, emergency legislation was enacted directing the State Water Resources Control Board to implement statewide mandatory water reductions. Specifically, RCWD was mandated to cut residential water use by 30 percent and agricultural use by 10 percent.

Since 2014 RCWD had relied on Itron's hosted fixed network equipped with leak detection technology and analytics to automate meter reading activities and proactively address water leaks across its system. The water district had already enjoyed the benefits of automation, realizing a 99 percent read rate, making it possible for existing meter reading staff to proactively address maintenance activities and customer requests such as move-in and move-out services.

RCWD was also leveraging data to address customer inquiries and proactively identify and address leaks in its distribution system. With this infrastructure already in place when conservation benchmarks were mandated, RCWD took quick action to utilize usage data more widely, providing customers with information about their personal water use, empowering them to help meet water conservation targets and save money.

In 2016 RCWD was recognized by the White House for their water conservation work and won the AWWA's Public Communications Achievement Award for their work to address the drought through a public outreach campaign and MyWaterTracker tool.

DATA FOUNDATIONAL TO CUSTOMER SERVICE & CONSERVATION

Leveraging the customer usage data RCWD collected using the Itron network, combined with real-time weather data and landscape GPS data, RCWD developed the MyWaterTracker application. Available to customers via the water district's website, the application displays a day-by-day budget for each customer in order to provide a clear picture of their personal water use, including how actual usage compares to the users individual water budget determined by the water district.



CUSTOMER

» Rancho California Water District

SERVICE TERRITORY

Located in Southern California, the Rancho California Water District provides potable, recycled and wastewater services to a population of more than 134,000 in Temecula, Murrieta and unincorporated areas of Riverside County.

GOALS

- » Reduce residential water use by 30%
- » Reduce agricultural water use by 10%
- » Empower customers to participate in conservation efforts
- » Identify system leaks proactively
- » Automate meter reading, billing and customer service

SOLUTION

Itron hosted fixed network solution equipped with leak detection technology and analytics in the cloud

BENEFITS

- » Instant access to data
- » Daily usage data accessibility for customers
- » Reduction in monthly water use ranging from 20 to 40 percent
- » 99% read rate



“Itron’s service is superb. Any time we’ve had issues, Itron has been available to answer questions and has even sent up a technical team to correct issues. Itron has always done a great job with support.”

– Jason Martin, Information Technology and Customer Service Manager

“We’ve received tremendous feedback since launching phase one of this project to residential customers in July 2015. In the first month we had 25 percent of our customers access the website without much promotion,” said Jason Martin, information technology and customer service manager at Rancho California Water District.

At the same time, RCWD began leveraging Itron Analytics in the cloud to provide more detailed information to customer inquiries and proactively address leaks found on customers’ property.

“Itron Analytics is used by our customer service team on a daily basis. For 30 percent of calls we go into the system to have a conversation with our customers about usage patterns to give them a clear picture of their use,” said Martin. “The ability to punch in an account number and see the usage history, two clicks to drill in to details instantly—it’s invaluable.”

PROACTIVE LEAK DETECTION EFFORTS

In addition to providing more detailed information when customers call the water district, RCWD is able to notify customers of leaks on their property, and fix distribution system leaks proactively before they become problematic.

RCWD’s meter department utilizes custom reports to identify and rank leaks in its system on a daily basis. From here the water district exports information to work orders, notifies customers and sends out field technicians to address the most severe leaks identified each day. Technicians are equipped with detailed leak information and are able to show in-home leak details to homeowners who are grateful to have this information before further water damage is done.

The metering department addresses an average of 10 leaks per day, and tracks every leak of more than one cubic feet per day across its system. Since 2014, RCWD has tracked well over 200 leaks, monitoring more than 4,000 cubic feet per hour of water leaking across the system.

“The most important information for us was creating a way to sort how many cubic feet of water was leaking in a 24-hour period,” said Adolfo Mendez, operations systems administrator at Rancho California Water District. “We know we have leaks, and we have the information necessary to be more proactive. We pride ourselves on sending people out to help identify leaks on residents’ property.”

“Having the Itron system allows us to be more proactive, we’re no longer waiting for someone to call us,” added Mendez. “Many times leaks are inside the home, and in some cases homeowners are on vacation or unaware of the severity of leaks.”



BENEFITS

During the first month implementing MyWaterTracker, RCWD realized a 22 percent water use reduction compared to the same month one year before. As the months rolled on, so did the amount of water conserved. In June, the water district realized an overall water conservation rate of 35 percent, and this figure increased to 42 percent in July. While a lot of this percentage can be attributed to cooler months than the year prior, conservation and the ability to see personal data played a key role.

“Data is definitely key when talking specifics with each customer,” said Martin. “Without data we could speak in blanket terms about conservation, but that does not apply to everyone and our customers know that. Now we can look at actual data and say to some, ‘you’ve already done a good job, we only need to cut back 10 percent’. This is helping everyone participate in conservation activities.”

In addition to leveraging Itron Analytics, which now utilizes the robust and secure Microsoft Azure cloud services platform, RCWD relies on Itron to host the network.

“We have a limited IT staff so we benefit greatly by not having to deal with back end IT,” added Martin. “Leveraging Itron to host our system has helped get our system up and running smoothly, and they are very good about getting back to us when questions arise.”

WHAT’S NEXT

Future phases of MyWaterTracker will include the addition of the Itron Analytics customer portal, automating and enhancing the amount of data shared with customers and the frequency of communication between the water district and customers. RCWD also plans to convert water conservation figures into dollars so customers can easily determine how much money conserving water saves them in real time.

Additionally, RCWD plans to leverage the same data to create an app customers can download to seamlessly view data and make more informed decisions from their mobile device.



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