

Finding Leaks and Other Problems in Your Irrigation System

City of Olympia, Public Works

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Finding Leaks Isn't Always Easy

Most systems run at night or very early in the morning, so you don't see them in operation. Run your sprinkler system at least once a month and check for broken heads, leaks, plants blocking heads, and other water-wasting problems.

Simple Solutions to Problems:

1. **Broken Sprinkler Heads:** If you notice unusual wet spots or dry areas in your lawn, turn your sprinkler system on and watch it operate. Repair or replace any broken or clogged sprinkler heads.
2. **Weak Output:** Watch your irrigation system in operation. Weak output at one or more sprinkler heads means there may be a leak, clog, or break somewhere. Weak output can also be caused by too many sprinklers on your system.
3. **Wet Spots:** Muddy spots, eroding soil, and bulging sod can all be signs of a broken pipe or riser. If your lawn is where the birds find worms, even when the weather is dry, this can also be a sign of trouble. You may need to do some digging to find the problem. Underground leaks can be difficult to identify and may need to be located by a specialist. Around your valves, the difficulty is typically loose connections or aging washers.
4. **The Lowest Sprinkler Head Leaks Constantly:** The problem isn't the sprinkler, but the valve—it's probably not shutting off completely. Other signs of trouble are taller or greener grass or moss growing around the sprinkler. Inspect the valve and replace any worn or damaged parts.
5. **The Valve Box Fills with Water:** If the valve box fills during watering, it should quickly drain afterwards. If it doesn't, you may have a leak. To find out, drain the box and look for leaks. Tighten packing nuts and replace washers if necessary.



If you think you have a leak but can't find its source, turn off all fixtures (indoors and out) and check to see if your meter is running. If it is, you have a leak somewhere. Indoors, toilets are a likely cause of leaks. The City has free toilet leak detection tablets available for our water and sewer customers. Contact us and we'll send them out. If you can't find the leak indoors, and you suspect it might be your irrigation system, you may need to call a contractor to assist you in finding it.

Want more information?

Contact: Linda Ayala, Water Conservation Program Assistant
Telephone: (360) 753-8570 or (360) 753-8270 (TTY)
Email: publicworks@ci.olympia.wa.us

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