

USU Researcher Exploring Ways to Improve Water Conservation Messaging | College of Engineering

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News Release — December 13, 2021 — As all of Utah continues to face significant drought conditions, residents are repeatedly asked to conserve water. But general conservation messaging that lacks suggested actions can leave individuals unsure of what steps would be the most impactful for them to take.

Utah State University Professor David Rosenberg and graduate student Mahmud Aveek are working to bridge that gap by researching what types of messaging can successfully encourage individuals to curb their water consumption. The goal of the research is to provide consumers conservation guidance that is personalized to their habits.



“For a conservation message to gain traction, a customer has to intend to conserve, have an opportunity, and have support from peers,” Rosenberg said. “We can help by analyzing 10-second water use data to identify what technology and behavior opportunities a household has.”

According to Rosenberg and Aveek, conservation information needs to be communicated in a way that explains why conservation is needed and frames conservation messages as potential opportunities with benefits. Examples include installing a dishwasher to save time, fixing leaks to prevent damage to a house, or reducing water use to match the consumption of neighbors. The messages should be targeted to the household’s information to maximize time, money and water savings.

Aveek pilot-tested several of these water conservation messages with colleagues and students at USU. Rosenberg said the purpose of these messages is to develop a conversation about conservation.

“Researchers and utilities want to engage the customer,” Rosenberg said.

And according to Aveek, two-way communication with the user needs to occur.

“One bold step can be developing a virtual platform for users,” Aveek said. “Studies in the energy field mention how a stable virtual platform can provide a more interactive environment for engaging users in conservation actions.”

Aveek said this is especially true for users who want to play with their water information data and visualize water use at hourly, daily, or monthly timestamps. It can also create a social aspect where users can see if other community members are saving water while providing a way for users to share water-saving tips with friends and neighbors.

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