








Georgia county lowers water usage in multifamily units

A helping hand in Georgia.

By John McNally

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Every drop matters, especially within the limits of Cobb County, Ga.

The metro Atlanta county with a population of more than 688,000 receives its drinking water from two, smaller basins from the Chattahoochee River and Allatoona Lake. But in 2009, Georgia lost a federal case and the presiding judge also issued a remedy saying the state would not be allowed to draw water from the Chattahoochee or nearby Lake Lanier unless it got approval from Congress. That approval never materialized.



Niagara Conversation Executive Vice President Carl Wehmeyer (left) showcases the company's Stealth ultra-high-efficiency toilet, one of the products that is part of the Green City Cobb Program. Photo courtesy of Niagara Conservation



That huge hole had to be filled and Nguyen's group went to the drawing board to find a solution.

Cobb County partnered with [Niagara Conservation](#) and Green Plumbers USA, and began to implement the Green City Cobb Program, which allows the opportunity for multifamily engineers, building operators and residents (in buildings constructed prior to 1993) to have new, high-efficiency kitchen and bath fixtures from Niagara retrofitted by certified green plumbers.

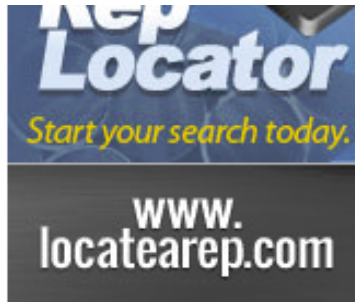
Green Plumbers USA Executive Vice President Jon Cruz says the already developed partnerships between his group, Niagara Conservation and Cobb County made it a natural fit. Cobb County and Niagara had been working together since 2005 when the region began a conservation program – a precursor to the Green City Cobb Program.

“Cobb County was one of the first communities to embrace our program,” Cruz says. “Then two years ago, we partnered with Niagara. Lo and behold when you strategize, have great partnerships and then see that your partners already have a relationship, it is ideal. It made sense for all of us to sit down and start discussing how we can put these moving parts together.”

Thinking about the long-term outlook of the Green City Cobb Program, Cruz adds: “We look at it as a great opportunity for the community to not only save water, but have a plan of continued improvement for years to come.”

In March, Cobb County Water System hosted an event in Marietta, Ga., to launch the program and the turnout was strong. So far, more than 50 contractors, building owners and engineers have signed up for Green City Cobb Program.

Nguyen reports that non-single family accounts use 42% of the water provided by Cobb County Water System despite only accounting for 9% of its overall accounts. Multifamily properties comprise a large portion of that water use. She also states that Cobb County would consider a 25% reduction in water usage for the sector a major success. The utility's internal estimates are even greater, she adds.



“Cobb has committed \$500,000 per year for three years to the project,” Nguyen says.

Cobb County purchases water wholesale at \$2.42 per 1,000 gal., and the program will help lower the total cost to the city. Additionally, Cobb County’s water delivery system is more than 70 years old, so the more ultra-high-efficiency products installed will help save on rehabilitation costs.

“It’s a very large system with more than 3,100 miles of pipe in the ground,” Nguyen says. “Any time you can lessen the stress on that infrastructure you’re going to extend its life.”

Cruz says the course is going to grow in the near future and urges engineers to get involved on the ground floor.

“While it’s a green plumber’s course we recommend everyone attend the class,” he says. “Through our partners at IAPMO, they are rolling out a class specifically for engineers and inspectors. We’re hoping for that to ‘hit the airwaves’ this summer.”

Each install that happens in Cobb County will include Niagara Conservation’s Stealth System, which includes the [EPA WaterSense-certified 0.8-gpf Stealth ultra-high-efficiency toilet](#), aerators for the bathroom and kitchen faucets, and an adjustable chrome showerheads, all with guaranteed 10-year warranties.