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NEWS RELEASE

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PSC Supports Efforts to Save Water by Plugging Leaks ***Backs EPA "Fix a Leak Week" while focusing on reducing leaks in water systems***

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 21, 2017) – Because wasting water is like pouring money down the drain, the Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC) is urging both water utilities and their customers to identify and repair leaks in their systems.

"Leaks, whether they are on the utility's side of the meter or on the customer's side, lead to water bills that are higher than necessary," PSC Chairman Michael Schmitt said. "An average home can lose about 10,000 gallons to leaks each year – an amount equal to roughly two months of normal usage."

The PSC is joining with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and utility regulators across the nation to promote Fix a Leak Week, which began Monday and ends Sunday.

The EPA estimates that more than a trillion gallons of water are lost nationally every year through leaks in residential plumbing. The EPA's WaterSense® program aims to reduce that loss by encouraging water users to address leaks and to also reduce consumption by installing more efficient plumbing fixtures.

As part of that effort, the PSC encourages Kentuckians to take the following steps:

- Check for leaks. Look for dripping faucets, showerheads, sprinklers, and other fixtures. Also check for toilets with silent leaks by putting a few drops of food coloring into the tank, waiting 10 minutes, and seeing if color appears in the bowl before you flush. Don't forget to check irrigation systems and spigots too.
- Twist and tighten hose and pipe connections. To save water without a noticeable difference in flow in your bathroom, twist on a WaterSense labeled faucet aerator.
- Replace the fixture if necessary. Look for WaterSense labeled models, which are independently certified to use 20 percent less water and perform as well as or better than standard models.

In many cases, fixture replacement parts pay for themselves quickly and can be installed by handy do-it-yourselfers or local plumbing professionals. Irrigation professionals certified through a WaterSense labeled program can also check your systems for leaks. Visit www.epa.gov/watersense for more information.

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While the cost of a leaky faucet or toilet is readily seen in higher water usage and a higher water bill, the cost of leaks in a water utility's system are not as obvious, PSC Chairman Schmitt said.

"A utility that is losing excessive amounts of water from its distribution system is paying to produce or purchase water that never flows through a customer's meter," he said. "The cost of that wasted water ultimately flows through to ratepayers."

In recent months, the PSC has placed a greater emphasis on addressing excessive water loss. Utilities have been placed on notice that water loss levels above 15 percent - the amount allowed by PSC regulations for the purpose of setting rates – will draw ongoing scrutiny and may lead to further action by the PSC.

About 50 utilities under PSC jurisdiction incur water losses in excess of 15 percent, with about a third of those in excess of 30 percent.

"The PSC certainly recognizes that the short-term cost of the infrastructure investments needed to reduce excessive water loss may exceed the cost of the wasted water itself," Schmitt said. "But, over the long term, a high level of water loss creates an unsustainable situation for a utility.

"That is why the PSC is going to work with affected water utilities to identify sources of funding and technical assistance that could reduce the financial burden on ratepayers," he said. "There is little question this problem needs to be addressed."

The PSC is an independent agency attached for administrative purposes to the Energy and Environment Cabinet. It regulates more than 1,500 gas, water, sewer, electric and telecommunication utilities operating in Kentucky and has approximately 75 employees.

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