



FACILITIES &
MAINTENANCE

Smart Water Systems Technology To Save Resources and Enrich Landscapes

BY ROSALIND FOURNIER

On college campuses, irrigation is a delicate dance—too little water turns lush landscapes into brown wastelands, while too much water drowns plants, wastes resources, and drains budgets. Finding the perfect balance is both an art and a science.

The significance of meeting that goal is hard to overstate. Students appreciate the beauty of well-maintained landscaping, making it an asset for recruitment. Many also place a high value on sustainability, which is reflected in an irrigation system that significantly reduces water waste. Students want the university or college they attend to share that value.

How do university and college campuses achieve the most efficient balance of thriving landscapes and sustainable watering? A well-designed and intuitive irrigation system goes a long way toward getting the right amount of water to the right places in campus, saving water and money in the process. In

many cases, water-bill rebates are also available for campuses using water-efficient products.

Moreover, having a high-efficiency irrigation system can count toward LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). According to the USGBC official website, “Outdoor water use accounts for over 30 percent of total water demand, presenting a significant opportunity for savings. Effective strategies include using native plants and improving irrigation efficiency.” Accordingly, users receive points toward LEED certification by using a highly efficient irrigation system.

To find the answers to some of the biggest challenges in campus irrigation, we spoke with Rick Hall, market development director for K-Rain, a leading innovator in irrigation technology. Here’s what we learned.

Meeting a Variety of Irrigation Needs

“On a single campus,” Hall says, “you have a lot of different types of watering requirements from your landscape—different types of turf grasses including warm or cold seasonal grasses; plant material with different sizes, maturity, native or non-native; and so forth. There are a lot of different watering requirements and soil conditions necessary to keep it all healthy.” An irrigation system programmed to deliver the right amount of water for different areas helps all landscaping thrive.

Landscapes also benefit greatly from an irrigation system that adapts to the weather. The landscape will require more water during a dry spell and little to no water after a series of rainy days. Whereas watering through

traditional sprinklers, such as the kind attached to a hose, requires maintenance staff to gauge how much water is needed on a given day, a system like K-Rain can make necessary adjustments automatically.

“You can program the frequency and duration of watering based on how much rainfall Mother Nature delivers directly into the controller,” Hall explains. “With technology, these controllers can use sensors to detect how much water you have, and with Wi-Fi they can talk to weather services. It will automatically adjust or suspend your irrigation without any human interaction whatsoever.”

To make the most of the water your irrigation system puts out, it also needs to be programmable to account for different types of soil and “how fast it can accept that water into the ground,” Hall says. “If you water too heavily too fast, that leads to runoff,

which doesn’t do any good for your water consumption or your landscape. We strive to put that ability to adjust into all our products” to maximize absorption and avoid waste.

Adjusting Irrigation to Match Landscape Changes

On university and college landscapes, change is a constant. Building additions and renovations, expansions, and other ways campuses evolve require adjustments to the irrigation system—not just the area of coverage but the volume of water dispersed.

“If you increase or decrease your area of coverage, you must also increase or decrease the volume of water so no area receives too little or too much.” Hall explains. “K-Rain’s patented Intelligent Flow Technology automatically changes the volume of nozzle discharge when making distance changes. It’s essentially like putting a light-dimmer switch directly into the rotor.”

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Self-Correcting Rotor Displacement

Gear-drive rotors, the water-delivery devices that pop up and deliver a single stream of water while rotating, are subject to displacement by any number of factors—someone stepping

on the head, commercial mowing equipment running into it, or even vandalism. When this happens, the water spray is misdirected and wasted as a result. “You’ll see these devices sometimes spraying water outside the area of coverage, out in the street or the walkways or against buildings and fences ... anywhere but

the area they’re supposed to be watering,” Hall says. “We have features that will automatically bring that water delivery device back into the area of coverage. That will save water and the health of the landscaping. If you’re watering out in the street that’s not doing any good for anybody.”

Optimizing Water Savings

Hall says all campus are “looking to reduce as much waste as possible. I would hope we’re helping to meet that requirement. In certain products, K-Rain has taken it a bit further with patented features no other manufacturer offers.” Several K-Rain products are WaterSense certified, meaning they have met the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) specification for water efficiency and performance.

Beautiful, healthy landscaping, a watering system that improves sustainable practices, and less room for either human error are all high priorities for colleges and universities. It’s worth doing the research and consulting with different irrigation-system companies to find out what works best for your campus landscape.

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