



## Shower Better Case Study

# Cobb County Showers KSU With Campus-Wide Savings

Cobb County Water System, a multi-year winner of WaterSense's Promotional Partner of the Year, wanted to make a big splash for Shower Better Month in October 2014. Kennesaw State University (KSU) in Kennesaw, Georgia, has a longtime partnership with the utility and a history of sustainability. The university had recently acquired Southern Polytechnic University, making KSU the second largest school in the Georgia state college system, and Cobb County saw an opportunity to help the university save water, energy, and money while enhancing its environmental outreach.

## Planning

Kathy Nguyen, senior project manager for Cobb County Water System, pitched the idea in August 2014 to Dr. Robert Paul, a biology professor who teaches sustainability courses where Nguyen had previously spoken. Paul provided contacts at KSU's central maintenance and athletic facilities (the university has a separate maintenance group just for athletic buildings). Recent economic cutbacks had the university looking for ways to reduce utility bills, so upgrades that could save both water and energy were a natural fit.

Cobb County met with both the central and athletic facility staff in September 2014, along with the marketing/public relations department and Residence Life representatives. Cobb County Water System offered up to \$10,000 worth of free WaterSense labeled showerheads, if KSU would provide the in-kind labor. "Surprisingly, we got consent right at that table," Nguyen said.

Showerhead performance was a concern, however. Although Nguyen promoted the certified performance of WaterSense labeled showerheads, KSU staff wanted students to test them before committing to a full upgrade. The group planned a two-week pilot, which Residence Life promoted through social media; the first 100 students to sign up received the new showerheads. "They had 100 percent satisfaction from the students that tested them," Nguyen said. "In fact, athletics wanted theirs before the pilot was completed."



## Upgrades

Cobb County Water System purchased 3,600 1.5-gallon-per-minute WaterSense labeled showerheads at a discount through New Resource Group for all of the dormitories and athletic facilities on campus. Getting that many showerheads shipped to KSU instead of the county proved a little challenging, since county purchasing was not used to approving offsite deliveries.

Residence Life wanted to make sure that students were supportive of the switch, so Cobb County Water System created fliers and signs about the benefits of WaterSense labeled showerheads before the installation. The utility brought Flo, the WaterSense spokesperson, to a festival held at KSU during Shower Better Month, where she and the university's owl mascot created buzz for the upcoming bathroom upgrades.

Installations were originally scheduled over Thanksgiving to take advantage of the empty dorm rooms, but facilities realized they needed more time and installed them over the winter break. When students returned in January, they all had shiny new water-saving showerheads in their suites. Since then? “We’ve only gotten positive feedback,” Nguyen said. “They’ve been really happy with them.”

### Lessons Learned

Cobb County Water System learned a number of things that could help other organizations considering similar upgrade programs:

1. **Get a Head Start:** The project was on a tight timeframe in order to promote the upgrades during Shower Better Month; the utility could have used more time to organize. “If we had it to do all over again, we would have started much earlier,” Nguyen said.
2. **Find a Champion:** Dr. Paul helped Cobb County find the right contacts at KSU and encouraged the sustainable upgrades. According to Nguyen, “It really is about the relationships you build and time spent laying the groundwork with people.”
3. **Foster and Facilitate Partners:** Everyone had a clear understanding of their roles and agreed to their responsibilities. Cobb County provided products, facilities coordinated installations, public relations promoted, and Residence Life worked with students. Nguyen checked in with partners throughout the process to keep it on track.
4. **Offer Incentives:** Part of the reason KSU signed on was because Cobb County purchased the showerheads. “You have to bring some skin into the game,” Nguyen advised.

Asked if they would do anything differently, Nguyen noted that Cobb County could have done more with the project after it was completed. “We wish we had promoted it more in the community.”

### Results

In the six months following the shower switch, KSU saved 666,000 gallons of water, or about 28 percent of the water used in the dorms, and about \$6,500 in water bills. Since Cobb County paid about \$9,500 for the showerheads, this retrofit at another university could potentially pay for itself in just one year.

Direct energy savings were not available following the project, however. “We wanted to find a way to isolate hot water use and measure pre- and post-upgrade, but we couldn’t find the right instrument to do so in that timeframe,” Nguyen said. Although the KSU dorms are not sub-metered, Cobb County is planning on looking at total annual water use before and after the upgrades to measure the longer term savings, as well as considering a post-retrofit survey of student satisfaction.

### Multi-Family Makeovers

Denver Water has brought water savings to students in partnership with the Auraria Campus—which includes the University of Colorado Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and the Community College of Denver. The multi-year project included WaterSense labeled showerhead retrofits.

The utility also launched a Water Challenge in 2014 with condo associations and apartment buildings that have high water bills. Last year, eight buildings installed WaterSense labeled toilets, aerators, and showerheads. Large apartment buildings were easier to target than individual condos, noted Denver Water’s Jeannine Shaw. “The biggest challenge is getting enough people on board, because they’re individually owned units,” Shaw said. “But neighbors make a good endorsement.”

Sometimes showerhead performance is questioned, and staff suggest the building install a labeled model in a common area like the pool or exercise room first to gather feedback. Denver Water also encourages building supervisors make showerhead swaps part of their maintenance routine—for example, swapping out showerheads when they inspect the smoke detectors or check door locks.