

**THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY ULTRA LOW FLOW
TOILET REBATE PROGRAM**

**THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY WATER DEPARTMENT
IN COOPERATION WITH
THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT**

P609 PHASE 3

BY

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**FINAL
REPORT
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7. Program Summary

The Hillsborough County ULF Toilet Rebate program opened to customers on October 1, 1994. Applications from customers began to arrive soon thereafter. Hillsborough County employees began tracking customers, performing inspections, and picking up the old toilets for recycling in November of 1994.

Volt VIEWtech began operating the toilet rebate program in April of 1995. On October 1, 1995 Hillsborough County decided to use its option to renew the Volt VIEWtech contract for a period of one year (FY 96). During that year, due to the unprecedented successes of the toilet rebate program, the contract with Volt VIEWtech was extended two times with a final goal of 13,756 units to be rebated.

Key to the success of the FY 96 program was the good rapport established with plumbing and retail "Trade Partners" early in the program. The rebate levels were seen as very fair and motivated many in the industry to actively promote the program with their customers. As a result a steady flow of new program participants arrived with minimal advertising dollars expended by Hillsborough County.

Hillsborough County continued an advertising campaign using both the local newspapers and radio spots. "Freddy the Frog" was seen throughout the area as the official mascot for the program. Freddy's likeness and voice could be seen and heard throughout the area, in schools, plumbing shops, and toilet installation companies, promoting water conservation in general and the toilet rebate program in particular. Freddy was the star of his own coloring book designed by Water Department staff and distributed to children in Hillsborough County.

The campaign was successful, generating name recognition and customer awareness of the toilet rebate program.

Customer response has been positive to the toilet rebate program. Participants are actually excited about their new ULF toilets, and water conservation in general. Many new program participants are recommended to the program by their family and friends. Anecdotal evidence of total water use reductions of 30% to over 40% are not uncommon.

There are several toilet installation companies that have set up operations in the area to market the rebate program. These companies provide their customers with quality, approved toilets at a price which is often lower than their local competitors. Unfortunately their marketing practices are sometimes misleading and often misperceived. Customers have complained about these installation companies' practices. We have worked closely with these companies to modify their advertising to meet the standards of Hillsborough County. Unfortunately, a legally correct advertisement can still lead the customer to the wrong perception.

While these toilet installation companies require time and effort to keep them focused in a manner consistent with the program requirements, they do provide a valuable function often servicing areas and populations other "local" companies do not. The considerable sum invested in advertising by these installation companies, and other local plumbers, saves county funds from being expended in this area. Overall this is seen as a good example of public / private cooperation.

To help maintain the current reductions in water use it is recommended that Hillsborough County emphasize the importance of proper maintenance procedures for homeowners. Dye tablets should continue to be available to customers for toilet leak tests. Local plumbing supply houses should be encouraged to maintain adequate supplies of replacement parts for the new ULF toilets.

The Hillsborough County Toilet Rebate Program has been a success. This has been due mostly to the cooperation and coordination between all parties involved. The desire of the Hillsborough County Water Department staff and the Volt VIEWtech staff to offer a quality, customer service oriented, conservation program has been instrumental to the program's success.