

Turning off the tap

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There is no question about the region's need to reduce its water consumption.

What is less clear is how this is going to be done given the ongoing expansion in the Middle East. One thing for certain is that the landscaping industry will have a major role to play in achieving the region's ambitious water reduction goals.

Irrigation is one of the biggest uses of water in the region, but also one of the biggest misuses of water, particularly at the residential level.

Sprinklers running mid-afternoon when evaporation loss is at its highest, irrigation systems that do a better job of watering pavements than plants, and overuse of hoses are just a few examples of poor practices.

Advances in technology mean that a significant amount of water could be saved just by switching to computer controlled systems. The problem is raising awareness - of the availability of such products, of the importance in investing in them, and of the mechanics in using them.

New design guidelines, such as the recently unveiled Estidama from the Urban Planning Council, will go some way to curbing bad habits, but more still needs to be done.

Perhaps the key is for greater involvement of the landscaping architect, and the irrigation contractor and supplier, at the concept stage so that designs can be tweaked for maximum water efficiency, as well as more discourse between outdoor design professionals and developers.

Caught between developers' conflicting demands of wanting to top sustainable ratings while at the same time create visions of lush greenery, outdoor design professionals are currently in a difficult position. How are they meant to achieve the one without sacrificing the other?

More involvement of the outdoor professional early on would mean more workable designs, better use of space, and, crucially, less water wastage. It might just be the solution to realising developments that both look green and are green.