

# City Press Release

## For Immediate Release

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## **GROSS MIS-STATEMENTS MADE BY MEDIA CONCERNING WATER USE IN ST. GEORGE**

**St. George-** The March/April 2005 Utah Economic and Business Review reports “Water Use and Residential Rate Structures in the Intermountain West”. The report was based on outdated information for the year 2000. Both the Salt Lake Tribune and KSL Television carelessly used this report in stories they published and broadcast and gave no explanation of how the report arrived at the numbers or what the numbers actually represented. It appears as if neither organization took the time to read the study but instead looked at the bulleted page and summary and created a story around extremely vague information.

In addition to using old information, the report is also confusing. For example, the report states that the population of the City of St. George is 90,354. According to the 2000 census the City’s population was 49,663. The cause of this confusion is that the report has attributed the population for all of Washington County to the City of St. George.

The report states that the City of St. George (Washington County) used 391 gallons of water per person per day, the highest water use reported. This determination was made using U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) estimates of water use by Washington County and then dividing that estimate by the County population.

Based on actual and accurately measured water use by the City of St. George for the year 2004, water use per person per day was 302 gallons.

Because of the resort nature of St. George, it has an unusually high number of secondary residences. These second homes use nearly as much water as primary residences but the owners of these homes are not counted in the St. George census. According to the 2004 County tax rolls there are approximately 6,500 secondary homes in the city. If it is assumed that these second homes use outside water for only nine months of the year, then the water use decreases to approximately 250 gallons per person per day in St. George.

The report points out that some communities which it compares to St. George, such as Ogden-Clearfield, have secondary water systems which are used for landscape watering. The report states that “If this secondary water system was considered (as part of the total water used), reported water use would undoubtedly be higher.”

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Currently the City of St. George does not have a secondary water system, but steps are being taken to require installation of secondary systems in certain new developments. Eventually secondary water will become available in St. George as additional water rights are acquired and there is economic justification. The use of secondary water for landscaping in St. George could further reduce the water used to less than 200 gallons per person per day.

Water rate structures were also discussed in the report. It states the St. George does not have a conservation rate structure. Again, because the report is based on outdated data, the information is incorrect. Over two years ago the City of St. George adopted a conservation water rate structure. The rate is structured so that those who use large amounts of water from April through September pay higher rates. The purpose of this rate is to encourage conservation, especially during the summer months when the water demands are at their highest.

The City of St. George, in cooperation with the Washington County Water Conservancy District and the Utah State Extension Office participate in and support many conservation efforts. These include workshops and numerous publications on improving efficiency of water use both in and out-doors and an annual water fair that teaches elementary students how to wisely use water. In addition, a demonstration garden showing water wise plant materials and watering techniques was created at Tonaquint Park in 2003 to educate Southern Utahans on sound water conservation practices.

The City of St. George takes water conservation very serious and has seen its residents respond in a supportive manner. It is important that attention is drawn to water use in order to precipitate positive change, but it is equally important to report accurate information to ensure that the right measures are taken while instigating such change.

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