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### Vista-based urinal company gets handle on water conservation

By Frank Green  
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

July 2, 2006

VISTA – Waterless Co. is helping the environment and itself with an unlikely hit product: a urinal that needs no water.

While a single flush of the typical porcelain piece sends up to two gallons of water cascading into oblivion, Klaus Reichardt's patented restroom fixtures use nary a drop to process a steady stream of liquid waste, saving an average of 45,000 gallons of water a year per device.



“People think that water makes things clean, because that's the way it has been done for the last 80 years,” said Reichardt, founder and managing partner of the Vista company.

EDUARDO CONTRERAS / Union-Tribune  
Klaus Reichardt is the founder and managing partner of Waterless Co., a Vista company that make urinals that require no water for their operation. The company's urinals are in hundreds of public restrooms across the United States and at national parks and military bases.

He said it has been “a bit tough” in the past to persuade people that water in a urinal is an unnecessary luxury.

Lately, though, the Waterless Co. is riding a growing wave of concern about water misuse in a world where about 1 percent of the supply is accessible to

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humans.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, for instance, recently unveiled its WaterSense program to certify water-efficiency in products such as toilets, urinals and irrigation equipment.

The Waterless Co., which is privately held, expects \$10 million in sales this year, up more than five-fold from its \$1.5 million in sales in 2000.

The company's urinals are in hundreds of public restrooms across the United States, including facilities at the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum in Atlanta, the Statue of Liberty in New York City and various national parks and military bases.

One of Waterless Co.'s largest clients is the Fort Huachuca Army base in Arizona, with about 600 of the company's products in its restrooms.

"We also have urinals on oil rigs and cruise ships," said Reichardt, adding that the newest growth areas include restaurants and hotels.

The Carlsbad Unified School District and the Del Mar Fairgrounds were among the company's first clients in the mid-1990s.

The devices use a vertical trap which allows urine to pass through a floating layer of alcohols and mineral oils. The solution forms a barrier that prevents sewer vapors from escaping. The waste then flows into a central tube and on to the main drain line.

"It's ridiculous to have more clean water going down (toilets and urinals) than what many people actually drink," said Michael Oshman, executive director of the Boston-based Green Restaurant Association.

The nonprofit organization, which has endorsed Waterless Co. urinals, assists restaurants across the country in converting to ecologically sustainable equipment and practices.

In the average household, the use of low-or no-water products and practices can save 30,000 gallons a year – enough to supply drinking water for 150 people for that year, the EPA estimates.

Reichardt said the new focus on water efficiency has attracted attention from competitors. In April, Kohler introduced several water-efficient bathroom products, including waterless urinals.

Reichardt, a former fashion jewelry importer, said he got the idea for waterless urinals when he heard about one that had been built in 1891 in Switzerland. California was in the midst of a major water shortage in the late-1980s and early-1990s, and Reichardt figured a business producing no-water bathroom fixtures would soar.

Reichardt and several family members invested between \$30,000 and \$50,000 to design a prototype and to pay a fiberglass manufacturer to begin producing pieces.

But the business only began to flourish within the last decade as the

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green-building movement gained steam.

Reichardt estimated that his Waterless devices, which cost between \$280 and \$500 each, cover their purchase price within two years because of lower water bills. Prices are comparable to, or less than, those for most flush-valve equipment.

Waterless has 10 employees at its sales office in Vista, as well as 24 sales representatives and distributors in the United States and 14 other countries. The company's products are manufactured at a factory in Los Angeles.

Reichardt said he welcomes the competition from Kohler and other manufacturers, noting that the increasing pressure has pushed him to refine designs and to add new models.

“There's no room for complacency in this business,” he said.

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■ Frank Green: (619) 293-1233; [frank.green@uniontrib.com](mailto:frank.green@uniontrib.com)

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