Seven City Schools to Capture Rainwater with Cisterns; Adds to Growing Number of Public Schools with Rain Capturing Devices

Cisterns to be purchased through SFPUC’s citywide discount rain barrel and cistern program available to City residents

October 19, 2010 (San Francisco) – Expanding efforts to divert stormwater from San Francisco’s aging sewer system and to further conserve the City’s pristine drinking water supply, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) today announced a new partnership with the SFUSD to place large rain water storage tanks, called cisterns, at seven public schools. The first four schools will purchase cisterns of up to 5,000 gallons with the three additional schools planning installations later this school year. The discounted cisterns are being made possible through the SFPUC’s Rain Barrel and Cistern Discount Program, now entering its third year.

“In the first two sold-out years, we created 40,000 gallons of rainwater storage capacity to conserve our precious drinking water, and reduce the burden on our sewers,” said SFPUC General Manager Ed Harrington. “Perhaps even more importantly we created a hands-on educational opportunity to teach kids about the importance of water and environmental stewardship.”

Since launching in 2008, the SFPUC’s Discounted Rain Barrel and Cistern Program has discounted 517 rain barrels and 37 cisterns. This year, based on the continuing successes, the SFPUC is increasing the discount by 17-25% so that San Francisco residents and schools participating in the expanded program will get $40 off the first 60 gallons of storage and $60 off each additional 60 gallons of storage. This will reduce the price of multiple rain barrels by 57% and cisterns by up to 55%.

SFUSD’s Director of Sustainability is pleased with the schools’ interest in the program. “Rainwater is much too valuable a resource to send down the drain, especially in a dry state like California.” Kaestner said that the school district’s rainwater harvesting program, called Tap the Sky, encourages the collection of rainwater for the purpose of watering school gardens.

Mr. Harrington and Mr. Kaestner were accompanied by students at Lafayette Elementary School in San Francisco, who gardened and carried out rain water harvesting related lessons adjacent to the school’s 3,000 gallon cistern. Lafayette is one of five San Francisco schools using cistern installations funded by the SFPUC. Four other schools have installed multi-unit rain barrel systems.
The four schools lined up to buy new cistern systems this fall are: Sunnyside Elementary (an 865 gallon system), Jose Ortega Elementary (up to 925 gallons), Longfellow Elementary (up to 1,940 gallons) and Stevenson (up to 1320 gallons). Alice Fong Yu, Clarendon and School of the Arts are in the process of planning their systems.

The program’s fully-outfitted 60 gallon rain barrels and 200+ gallon cisterns are available for purchase at The Urban Farmer Store in San Francisco. The discounts are subsidized by the SFPUC’s Wastewater Enterprise. For more information on the SFPUC’s Discounted Rain Barrel and Cistern Program, visit http://stormwater.sfwater.org (select “Rainwater Harvesting”) or call 415-554-3289.

Rainwater harvesting is the practice of capturing rainwater that runs off hard surfaces like roofs. Harvesting the rain offers a simple way to conserve limited drinking water supplies. San Francisco’s combined sewer system, which treats both stormwater and sanitary sewage, will also benefit from increased rainwater system installation through minimized flooding and reduced combined discharges into the Bay and Pacific Ocean during major winter storms. To learn more about the City’s combined sewer system, visit sfsewers.org.

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