



Irrigation helps University brand

SMART WATERING CASE STUDY: LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

As New Zealand's specialist land-based university, Lincoln University's green, lush campus helps reinforce a brand which is focused around sustainability and productivity.

"Our grounds are very important to us and need to be looking good. If our lawns dry out, which the students love to sit on, it reflects on us here at the campus," says Grounds Coordinator Shane Timbrell.

Irrigation plays a major role in ensuring the 50 hectare grounds stay green, healthy and resilient year-round. Currently Shane's team is in the process of modernising their irrigation systems.

"We've got a couple of good automated systems that work across the whole campus and then we've got automatic systems which we can't rely on because of their age. We have problems with these systems staying on when they are supposed to be shut off sometimes causing flooding. So we are using these manually at the moment."

Shane's exploring whether these can be repaired or will need a major overhaul. "It's very time consuming irrigating the parts of the campus that aren't automated. We want to get as many of the high profile areas back up and running and would like to be putting on a lot more water than we can currently."

He suspects an investigation of the 30-year-old systems will reveal tree or grass roots have grown into the pipes. The modernisation work will take place over the next two seasons.

"Hopefully the lines are still good. We'll get irrigation consultants in to have a look after we locate the old plans and establish where everything is."

But while upgrading will help reduce hours spent irrigating, efficient watering across the campus relies on good practice, as much as technology, says Shane.

"All last year we applied a lot of mulch which will help us maintain water in the soil. We use chippings from the trees we've had to cut down around the campus for the new build."

Other strategies include watering early morning and late in the day. "Last summer, there were water restrictions and we had to be seen to be doing our part. We do need to irrigate but we try and do it first thing in the morning."

In established parts of the grounds irrigation is reduced as plants bed in, but new areas often require hand watering. "A lot of the lawns and gardens are pretty much established so have less need for water. And as we plant we are trying to incorporate irrigation systems."

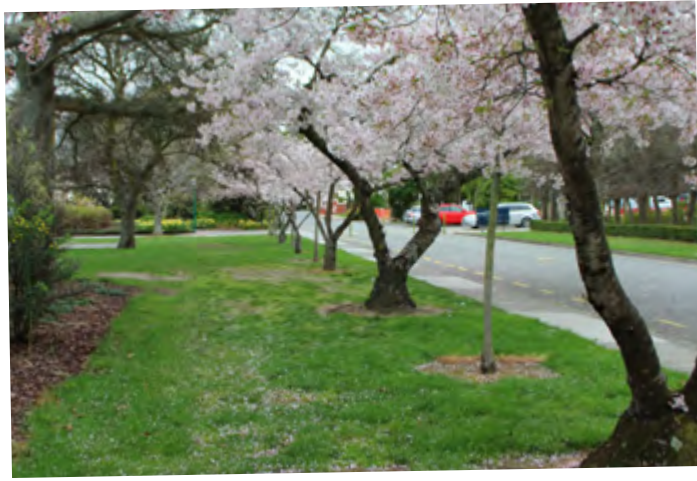


Shane Timbrell, Lincoln University's Grounds Coordinator



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Aluminium pipes like soaker hoses are good for gradual release of water and a weeping hose is used in the rose garden with a timer. The weeping hose network is removed when the irrigation season is over so it doesn't affect plant growth.

Other obstacles the grounds staff face maintaining irrigation systems include mower damage to pop-up sprinklers and student hi-jinks. "We do get a little bit of student vandalism if the pop up sprinklers don't retract and sometimes they get cut off by the lawnmower. So we're often replacing parts or they end up firing water in the wrong direction."

Managing the campus's water needs in a district that regularly suffers water restrictions during summer is a constant challenge, says Shane. "Not only do we have to be seen to be using water wisely we actually have to use water wisely, particularly as the university sells itself as being land-based. We have a lot of people on campus and we often get comments about our watering. So we try to only water when it's necessary and at night to avoid evaporation and get maximum penetration in the soil. Irrigation plays a major part in maintaining our grounds and assists with de-compaction. If we going to put resources into fertilising the lawns, irrigation is a key component of that."

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