

Earth Log: People walked, drove by without even noticing illegal watering downtown

By Mark Grossi



Sprinklers at a city parking garage run in the middle of the afternoon Wednesday.

MARK GROSSI — The Fresno Bee

The phone caller said he was from Southern California, visiting Fresno. He said he couldn't believe his eyes Wednesday afternoon when he saw a stream of water coming from a city of Fresno parking garage structure at Inyo Street and Van Ness Avenue.

"Go out there and check it out for yourself," he told me, adding that he had reported the problem to the city. "You have to do better than this in California."

The caller was right. The grass sprinklers were running and water was streaming into the gutter.

Illegal watering goes on a city of this size. But in such an intense drought, I find I am taking more photographs of it, like this one. What struck me the most peculiar: People walked and drove by without even noticing.

I waited until someone showed up to shut off the valve. She told me there was some kind of a problem with the valve. Water poured into a large drain continuously for the half hour I was there.

Fresno Bee reporter John Ellis posted something on Twitter to make sure everyone knew what was happening. City spokesman Mark Standriff, who has spoken with me many times about these kinds of problems, responded.

“Glad he's on the scene. With over 1330 irrigation systems citywide, it's hard to know where all the problems are. Will fix ASAP.”

On Thursday, Standriff told me there was some kind of malfunction that prevented city workers from shutting down the flow at the valve. Finally, the city shut down the electricity to the garage and that stopped the water.

“It was very odd,” Standriff said. “I want to emphasize that the caller did the right thing by letting us know immediately. We need to have those calls.”