

# Video Feature: As California Thirsts, These Apps Help Save Water

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## App Smart | Track Your Water Usage

Many people are looking for ways to keep track of their water consumption. New apps like Vizsafe, Drip Detective and Dropcountr can help you save water and save money.

By Kit Eaton on Publish Date May 20, 2015.

### App Smart

By

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**CALIFORNIA'S drought** is a powerful reminder of the vulnerability and precious nature of our water resources. To become more responsible with water usage and waste, a few apps can help people learn about and reduce their water consumption.

One is Vizsafe, which tries to encourage responsible water usage through the age-old mechanism of peer pressure. The principle is simple: If a user sees water overuse, he can snap a photo or record a smartphone video and upload the evidence to Vizsafe for all to see.

For example, someone may spot a business that is overwatering its grass, causing wasted water to run onto the sidewalk. A user can take a picture and upload the geolocated photo to the app. The hope is that the business takes note of the public shaming and turns down its sprinkler system. Inside the app, users can browse a list of photos and videos that other people have uploaded or see reported issues on a map.

Vizsafe's blurb promises that it is all about "being a good neighbor" and supporting "your community's well being." The app also has other neighborhood-watch features like reporting crime or even giving a thumbs up to a good Samaritan.

Some may feel that using the app is akin to snitching on people, but there are situations in which it is impossible to directly approach someone wasting water, which is when Vizsafe becomes the most useful. Vizsafe does not require users to associate their real identities with uploads.

The app is not exactly pretty, nor is it particularly well designed. Its menus and controls are sometimes clumsy and confusing. But it is still fairly easy to use, and is free for [iOS](#) and [Android](#).

For another way to save water, try educational apps like Drip Detective, which helps people understand one of the most common ways we waste water at home — via a leak, or a dripping tap in a sink or bathtub. Using Drip Detective, people can tap their phone screen in time to the drips. For more serious leaks, the app asks users to time how long the leak takes to fill a measurable volume, like a teaspoon or cup. Drip Detective then estimates the rate of water waste.

Merely learning how many gallons of water a year is being wasted could prompt users to fix a leak, but there is also a section in the app where people can type in the cost of water shown on their water bill, and Drip Detective will show the dollar value of water that is escaping down the drain.

Drip Detective has plain graphics and is not fancy, but its message is powerful. This app is also a great tool for teaching children to properly shut off a faucet when done using it. The app is free for [iOS devices](#).

H2O Tracker is an educational water-saving app that takes a more gamelike approach. The main part of the app is a quiz where users score points by answering questions about how much water is used for a shower or bath, to wash a car and so on.

Users may realize how much water they waste — and be shocked into changing their habits. To help put figures in context, the app can show a person's water use compared with that of the average app user, or even with other people who live nearby.

H2O Tracker also includes advice on how much water to give plants to keep them alive during a drought without being wasteful, as well as how people should and should not use water in a drought to comply with official restrictions. In addition, there is a section where users can upload evidence of water being wasted, a little like Vizsafe.

H2O Tracker is interesting to play, well designed and its advice is well written, so it is useful for educating young people. H2O Tracker is free for [iOS](#) and [Android](#).

Another app, Dropcountr, which is also free for [iOS](#) and [Android](#), promises to give consumers a new way to understand their water consumption by connecting directly to utility companies and showing real-time analytics inside the app. By being better informed, people can then manage how much water they use in their home, saving money and reducing waste.

Yet many app store reviewers point out that Dropcountr does not connect to many utility companies, so its usefulness may be limited depending on the user's location.

People tend to take clean, plentiful water for granted. These apps help people see if they need to change their water habits.

## **Quick Call**

The popular service Sunrise Calendar has added a neat feature to its iOS app in a recent update: a dedicated keyboard button to find a blank space in the user's calendar, even when using other apps. The idea is to make it easy to arrange a meeting while doing something like answering an email. Clever. Sunrise is [free for iOS](#).