

Informational Pamphlet – Water Conservation

Water Conservation

Think about water. It's yours for the asking, 24-hours a day. All you have to do is turn on a faucet. But, now think again.

The water you use doesn't come magically from nowhere. It's a carefully manufactured product – clean, safe and piped directly into your home – a valuable resource that shouldn't be wasted or taken for granted.

Water will eventually recycle itself. But, the high quality water that we need and expect in our homes is not an infinite resource. Water conservation is a good way of life.

Saving in the Home

Household water conservation not only saves water, it saves energy, too; energy needed to heat water, and to run appliances.

The bathroom is where you can make the most substantial reduction in your personal water use. Two-thirds of the water used in an average home is used in the bathroom, mostly for flushing toilets and for showers and baths. A lot of that water may be going to the sewer needlessly, adding to the volume of sewage and putting an extra burden on the treatment plants.

Toilets

Every time a toilet gets flushed, about seven gallons of water goes into the sewer. There are two ways to cut down here – first, don't use the toilet for things it was not meant for; second, reduce the water per flush.

Toilets should not be used as trash cans to flush away tissues, gum wrappers, cigarette butts, bugs, diapers or anything else that ought to go in a wastebasket or garbage can. All of us can do it at one time or another, but the use of the toilet as a wastebasket is just another phenomenal waste of water. Imagine pouring three two-gallon buckets of water on a small spider or piece of tissue. It's ridiculous!

Most toilets use more water than is really necessary and work just as well with less. So you can put a brick in the tank to displace some of the water – right? Wrong! The extra weight might crack your tank. Besides, the bricks may begin to disintegrate after a while, causing serious and expensive problems in the plumbing.

Use a plastic soap or laundry bottle instead. It's safe, easy, and inexpensive. Fill a few bottles with water to weight them and put them in the tank.

CAUTION: Don't put the bottles where they'll jam the flushing mechanism. And be sure you don't displace so much water that you have to double-flush to get the thing to work. Double flushing wastes more than you save.

Toilets are notorious for their hidden leaks. They can waste hundreds of gallons a day undetected. Leaks occur when the toilet is out of adjustment or when parts are worn, so it's important to check it periodically. It's not hard or complicated.

Most toilet leaks are at the overflow pipe or at the plunger ball. If it's at the overflow, the water level is usually too high, although the overflow pipe sometimes may leak below the waterline. Gently bend the arm until the valve shuts off the water about a half inch below the top of the overflow pipe. Sometimes the valve is worn and will run, like a leaky faucet and must be replaced. If you're an experienced "do it yourselfer" you can do the job. Otherwise, call a plumber.

Plunger ball leaks aren't easy to spot. The best way to check is by dropping a little food coloring into a tankful of clear water and waiting to see if the color shows up in the bowl. If it does, you probably have a leak at the plunger ball, either because the ball needs replacing or because the mechanism is out of alignment. This is a relatively simple repair for a "do it yourselfer."

Showers

People used to think that showers were less wasteful than baths, period. But, what they failed to take into consideration was the fact that many of us tend to spend approximately ten to 20 minutes or more in the shower. Unfortunately, since most showers use between five and ten gallons of water per minute, that usage can add up in a hurry.

However, there's no hard and fast rule. It's more a matter of self-control. A partially filled bathtub uses far less water than a long shower, while a short shower uses less than a full tub. Time yourself next time you step under the shower. The odds are you really don't need to stand there that long, nor do you need the shower running at full, hot blast.

Shaving and Brushing your Teeth

Don't leave the water running. Run as much as you need, then turn off the tap until you need some more. Water running unused goes straight down the drain. It adds up to a lot of wasted water.

Kitchen

Automatic dishwashers claim the most water in kitchens, about twelve gallons per run. The secret here is to make sure the washer is fully loaded before you turn it on because it's going to take that 12 gallons whether there's a dinner full of dishes or just a couple of cups.

Don't bother rinsing the dishes in the sink before you put them in the dishwasher. Scrape them clean and let the machine do the rest.

Are you the dishwasher in your household? Remember not to wash them with the water running. A sinkful of wash water and one of rinse water will do the job just as well.

Don't let the faucet run when you scrub vegetables or prepare other foods, either. Put a stopper in the sink instead.

And for a cold drink of water, don't stand there letting it run endlessly. Store a jug of ice water in the refrigerator.

Laundry

Many washing machines use 40 or more gallons of water a load whether you have them stuffed full or with only a couple of socks. Save up for a full load and make your water work efficiently. Or remember to set your machine for a lesser load if it can be adjusted. As with the dishwasher, you save energy and electricity as well as water.

For hand laundering put a stopper in the washtub for both wash and rinse. Don't let the faucet run.

Leaks

A little leak loses lots! Just a slow drip can add up to 15 or 20 gallons a day, while a 1/16 inch faucet leak wastes 100 gallons in just 24-hours.

Most leaks, aside from toilets, are in faucets and are most commonly caused by worn washers. Check all the faucets in the house once or twice a year. If any of them drip after you've turned them off firmly, turn off the supply line, take the faucet apart and replace the washer. Usually it's not hard, although some faucet designs do present a challenge. Any good household do-it-yourself book offers easy to understand advice if you need it.

It's important to get the size right. The washer has to fit inside a sort of cup on the valve stem and spread out to the edges when it's screwed down. If the drip is still there when you're done, you may have something else wrong. Get in touch with a plumber.

If the leak is on one of those faucets with a single lever or "joystick" to control both hot and cold, the disassembly and repair is still relatively simple, but entirely different from the valve stem-and-washer type. A good hardware or plumbing supply store will have necessary replacement parts and can probably direct you to a good instruction source, too, if you need it.

Shut-Off Valves and Emergencies

Water heaters have been known to blow out and pipes have been known to burst. Occasionally, a faucet decides to become a fountain. When this sort of thing happens, you'll want to know how to turn everything off. Either that or lay in a supply of wading boots.

Most sinks, wash basins, and toilets in the house have shut-off valves below them that cut-off water to that particular fixture. The hot-water heater also has a shut-off valve to cut off hot water to the whole house. Unfortunately, most of us don't have shut-offs for bathtubs or showers, because the plumbing is usually behind the wall. Check your house now and identify all of those shut-off valves; see if they work.

Most importantly, check for the main shut-off valve that turns off the whole house. It's usually located where the water pipe comes into the house. Check to see if you have one that works. If you don't, or it doesn't work, contact a plumber to stop by and correct the situation.

The Great Outdoors

States that enjoy warm weather during most of the year often find half, or more of the water piped into homes goes right back out through hoses onto lawns and gardens. Northern states find the same in summer months.

It's a fact of life that when more water is used outside, more is wasted there. But, you don't have to let your lawn turn brown or the car turn dusty to conserve water. Use common sense instead.

The basic principle of lawn and garden watering is not to give them more than they need. Don't follow a fixed schedule. But, water the grass or plants when they show signs of needing it. During a cool or cloudy spell, you don't need to water as often.

Heat and wind will rob your lawn of water before they can use it. Avoid watering on windy days and you'll avoid having most of the water to go where you don't want it. Be sure to water in the cool of the day, both to avoid excess evaporation and the chance of harming the lawn. Weeds are water thieves too, so keep the garden free of them.

Let water sink in slowly. Lots of water applied fast mostly runs off into gutters. Also, if you let water sink in deep, the lawn will develop deeper roots and won't need watering as often, as well as being more resistant to disease and wear.

A kitchen timer is a handy reminder for turning off sprinklers. And make sure when the sprinklers are on that they cover just the lawn or garden, not sidewalks, driveways or gutters.

Other Outdoor Use

Your garden hose can pour out 600 gallons or more in only a few hours. Remember that when you leave the sprinkler running all day or leave the hose unattended. Thousands of gallons can be lost in a very short time.

When washing the car, use a bucket for soapy water and use the hose only for rinsing. Running water in the driveway won't get the car any cleaner.

Another water waster is using the hose to sweep away leaves. Use a rake and broom to clean up sidewalks, driveways and gutters.

Water Conservation...A Good Way of Life

Water conservation is a good way of life. Remember where water comes from and where it goes. A toilet flush uses up to seven gallons, water taps run at about five gallons a minute while waiting for hot or cold, showers use five to ten gallons a minute and leaks can soak up hundreds or even thousands of gallons of water a day.

It isn't hard to conserve water. Doing it doesn't change our lives drastically. However, it's mostly a matter of using good common sense. Think about water – and when you do – think about conserving it.