Water

Inter-American Water Day
5 October 1996

WATER, TOO VALUABLE TO WASTE!
As stated in the Inter-American Water Day Declaration, public awareness is essential for bringing about improvements in the conservation of the water resource and in drinking water supply. Education has proven to be an effective mechanism in which we can raise public awareness about water issues. As such, this booklet has been prepared for the Inter-American Water Day, which will be celebrated on 5 October.

This booklet is aimed at Secondary School students. It is intended to be used as an informational guide to raise their awareness about the need to place greater value on this natural resource—water. The various ways that water is wasted and the simple steps that could be implemented to prevent such wastage are outlined. We can teach students to not only be aware of the importance of conserving and protecting water....but to care.
As populations grow the demand for clean water continues to increase, thus placing stress on fresh water resources. The misuse and abuse of this valuable resource continues to be a problem. Because we see water all around us, seas, rivers, ponds, lakes, and streams, we believe that there must be an unlimited supply of this resource. The reality is that supplies of clean, usable water are limited, and we must therefore learn to use them more wisely if we expect to continue to enjoy the benefits they provide at a reasonable cost.

We know that water is required for many different activities in our daily lives, that plants, animals and human beings need water to survive. Yet, many people pay little attention to the importance of saving this valuable resource. People continue to take water for granted, and waste water. If we were to make a list of the things that we do each day, we would see how much we depend on water, and why we must place greater value on this resource. Every day water is used for:

- Domestic activities
- Agricultural activities
- Industrial production
- Recreational purposes
- Commercial activities

**HOW DO WE WASTE OUR WATER?**

Much of the water used in our daily activities is simply wasted. Water should always be used wisely in the home, work place or community. Leaving taps running while brushing your teeth, or running water when hand-washing dishes are some ways water is wasted in the home. Outdated plumbing fixtures also contribute to water wastage. Such wasteful practices allow for gallons of useful water to be thrown down our drains.

At school or in the work place, when we use the taps and leave them running after use, or destroy fixtures and they are not promptly repaired, then we contribute to the problem. In our communities, fire hydrants and public stand pipes that are left opened not only waste valuable water, but it also contributes to a reduction in water pressure. Low water pressure hinders the local fire services ability to effectively fight fires.

**FINDING THE BALANCE?**

How can we find the balance between “using and abusing” water?

The answer is to use water wisely, and more efficiently:

- Reducing where appropriate the amount of water consumed in our daily activities,
- Reusing water for purposes such as agriculture and watering plants,
- When using community water sources such as standpipes, and communal wells, you must be careful not to abuse these sources.
Likewise, rivers, streams, ponds and other available water sources should be protected. Bathing or washing clothes in the rivers and streams allows for soaps and detergents to contaminate the source.

If each person saves a little, it can add up to major savings in water, energy and money. Therefore, people need to be more conscious of the way they use water in their homes, communities, and in the workplace. Implementation of the above approaches will help to protect the resource now, and for the future.

WATER CONSERVATION: Let us each do our part to use water wisely

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED... what happens to the water you use each day? Take time to think of how much water you used today, and did you use it wisely? Did you conserve water, or did you let it go down the drain? Chances are that you, like many other people, wasted water today.

Where do we start? Other than school and work, the home is where we spend most of our time, and it is where we have the most control over how things are done. Therefore, water conservation should begin at home. For many people in Latin America and the Caribbean, access to running water in the home may not be a reality. Public stand pipes, rivers, streams and communal wells are their only water source, water conservation also applies to these sources. Here are some conservation methods we could all practice in and around our homes.

Water-saving tips for the kitchen

- When hand-washing dishes, try to use two basins, one for washing and one for rinsing, rather than allowing the faucet to run continuously. Another alternative is to soap all dishes, then turn on the faucet to rinse them.
- In homes where running water is not available, the same principle applies. If you usually go down to the river, or stream to wash your dishes, do not wash the dishes directly into the source. Take a bucket of water and use the water to wash your dishes.
• When defrosting frozen food, though it is much easier and faster to run water over the package, save water by placing the food in the refrigerator overnight.

• Keep a bottle of drinking water in your fridge, instead of running your tap until the water gets cool each time you want some water. Remember always rinse the container and change the water every few days.

• Clean vegetables by putting them into a pan of water rather than letting the tap run needlessly.

• Be sure to always turn taps off tightly so they do not drip.

• Never leave the standpipe running. Remember to turn it off after each use. Report leaking/running standpipes to the authorities.

• Inspect all pipes and faucets for leaks, as hundreds of gallons of water a day could be dripping away.

Here are eleven ways you can save water in the bathroom

The bathroom is the one room in our homes that use the greatest amount of water, and toilets are by far the biggest water-guzzling appliance, followed closely by the shower and bath. Next time you flush your toilet, remember that on average, each of us uses 175 liters of water a day just flushing our toilet.

• When brushing your teeth, turn the water off while you are actually brushing, instead of running it continuously. Then, use the tap again for rinsing. (This would save about 80% of the water that is normally used).

• Take short showers—turn off the water while you are soaping and shampooing, and then rinse off quickly.

• When using your community standpipe, don’t leave it on while you lather up your body—turn off the water, soap your body, then rinse off quickly.
- When you go to a river, stream, pond or favorite bathing area to bathe, take a bucket with you, put your water into it, and use the water to bathe.
- Promptly repair any leaks in and around taps and faucets.
- Replace old toilets. If your toilet is more than ten years old, it's probably a water waster. Replace it with a new efficient low-flush toilet. Low-flush toilets use a smaller tank and a specially designed bowl to give the same flush power, but with a lot less water. If this is too costly, then, there are many devices that you can install in your existing toilet to reduce the amount of water in a flush cycle.

- Flush your toilets only when necessary. Never use the toilet as a garbage can to dispose of cigarette butts, paper tissues, etc.
- Put toilet dams in all toilet tanks to reduce water consumption. By installing toilet dams on your old toilet, you can use between 25% and 40% less water, thus reducing the water flow by up to 18,000 liters per year.
- A home-made method is to simply place pebbles or marbles in two plastic, one-liter soap or bleach container, fill them with water, and stand them inside the toilet tank, one on each side. This is a preferred method to placing rocks or bricks in your toilet, since they can break down over time and cause damage.
- Toilet inserts. These may be available in some areas as an alternative to plastic bottles. With a toilet insert, a family of four could save about 45,000 liters of water per year.
- Check your toilets regularly. Put a few drops of food coloring into the toilet tank. If the color leaks into the toilet bowl without flushing, check the seal at the bottom of the tank for leaks.
In the yard and garden

You can still maintain healthy looking yards and gardens by reducing the amount of water you use.

- Water gardens and lawns during the early morning or evening hours, these times are usually the coolest part of the day. Avoid watering on windy days.
- Reuse water used for cooking, cleaning and washing to water plants, backyard gardens and to fill toilet tanks.
- Do not over water your garden. Soil cannot store extra water, therefore the excess water is wasted. Much of the water applied to lawns and gardens is lost due to evaporation, or run-off because of over watering.
- Start a compost heap. It is good for the garden. Save things like vegetable peelings and fruit skins, add some grass clippings or leaves...put them in an old container with holes in the bottom to let the air through...cover with dry grass or cuttings.
- Place a layer of mulch around trees and plants so that more water can be retained.
- Water used for the lawn and garden does not have to come out of your tap, cisterns that capture and store rainwater, large rain barrels, and other containers can be used as a source of irrigation water.
- Avoid using pesticides/hazardous materials in our garden/yard, they can wash down storm drains and into lakes and rivers. They can also seep into underground water. Pesticides and hazardous materials are not only harmful to human beings but they can be toxic to other forms of life.

The control of pests in houseplants and the garden can be accomplished using methods other than pesticides, including:

- Pulling weeds by hand
- Rotating garden crops each year in order to prevent depletion of soil nutrients and to control soilborne diseases.
- Cultivating your garden. Regular hoeing will control weeds and keep plants healthy and more resistant to insects.
- Using an insecticidal soap, or plain soap water, to dislodge or suffocate insects, or dislodging them using a stream of water from a garden hose.
- Use of natural fertilizers such as compost.
AT ALL COST AVOID CHEMICALS THAT ARE DANGEROUS TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND TO YOU

Water conservation. It is quite simple. By using less water you can still continue to do the things that you normally do. Conservation, simply means to re-think the way you use water, and to adapt where possible more water efficient practices. By applying many of the above steps to your daily lives, you would see the change you can make. We can each make a difference if we begin to care for and protect this valuable resource that gives our planet life.

HOW CAN ONE PERSON HELP?

You can do more than you think. Follow these simple rules:

- Get involved.... All citizens, including children need to be aware of the importance of safe drinking water—and their role in keeping it safe. Citizens also need to become involved in the decisions that affect their drinking water.

- Exercise your rights as citizens...be informed, participate in or organize your own community meetings that address water issues that affect your community. Knowledge is powerful. In areas where there is no water, or intermittent water supply, place pressure on the authorities to improve the conditions of the citizens.

- Eliminate wasteful practices and habits, or improve the efficiency of your water by using water-saving fixtures and devices in your home, business or schools.

- Conservation begins at home.... What we learn at home, we generally practice in public. If parents teach children at an early age to develop good conservation practices, they are likely to practice them in and outside the home, and later transfer them into adulthood.

- Report broken or leaking pipes to the appropriate authorities.

- If there is a water tank on your premise avoid water tank overflow.
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS
1. Doing the same with less (12 letters).
3. Place a layer of _______ around trees and plants so that more water can be retained (5 letters).
4. _______ this valuable resource (4 letters).
5. By making small changes you can _______ the amount of water you use (to make small).
8. Promptly repair any _______ in and around taps and faucets (5 letters).
10. See 7 down. Begins with the letter H.
12. Liquid necessary to life (5 letters)
13. Always keep a _______ of drinking water in your fridge, rather than running your tap until the water gets cool each time you want some water (6 letters).

DOWN
1. _______ heaps are good for your garden.
2. Paints, _______ should not be thrown down your drains.
6. To make impure, dirty.
7. With 10 across, they should be avoided at all cost in your garden and lawn.
9. Always turn _______ off tightly so they do not drip.
11. By using water wisely you will save water, money and _______.
12. Don't _______ water.

WORD FIND?

Here are some words that are associated with the contamination of water sources. Water conservation goes beyond just saving our water. We must also protect this natural resource, that means that we must be aware of the things we do in our daily lives that impair the quality of our water.

See if you can find them!

SCYCLEEDWSVEASPPSG
ESOLVENTSSVBEALKF
WSSOFGHTARZPSSAE
ABSEDBGHEAEQATAER
GPTHALGORMZJLIALT
EWNELOCKCUIUICPDEI
LAITEMITYGLIOSPINAL
ANAEOITIRCPTIYSSTI
PPELCYCRETAWSELZ
DAGNAAAPETIGHTPTO
PISBACTERIAITEQSEE
SONSETARTINPOMOAR
SEDICIBREHMMOSTPGS
SLATEMSCESSPOOLSOB
CGHISLACIMEHCOPGIF

-Pesticides -Gasoline leaks -Cesspools
-Nitrates -Septic systems -Paints
-Sewage -Herbicides -Solvents
-Bacteria -Fertilizers -Metals
References


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