

SOME THOUGHTS ON EFFICIENT USE OF WATER

Clean water; it's ours for the asking, 24-hours a day. All we have to do is turn on a faucet. How often do we consider that the water which is so easily acquired is a carefully manufactured product – clean, safe and piped directly into our homes – 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 and the costs to provide it continue to rise. Water efficiency should be one of our daily priorities.

SAVING IN THE BATHROOM

The bathroom is where we can gain the most substantial efficiency in our 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 and cost on the treatment plants.

TOILETS

Every time a toilet gets flushed, about 7 gallons of water goes into the sewer. There are two ways to cut down – 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. Most toilets use more water than is really necessary and work just as well with less.

DO NOT place a brick in the tank to displace some of the water! The extra weight might crack your tank. Also, the bricks disintegrate over time, 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. Be careful not to place 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 is saved.

Toilets are also notorious for hidden leaks, as hundreds of gallons a day can go undetected. Leaks occur when the toilet is out of adjustment or when parts are worn, so it's important to check it periodically. 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. Plunger ball leaks aren't always easy to spot. The best way to check is by dropping a little food coloring into the tank and wait to see if the color shows up in the bowl. If it does, you probably have a leak at the plunger ball and either needs replacing or the mechanism is out of alignment.

SHOWERS

People still tend to think that showers are less wasteful than baths. However, many of us tend to spend approximately ten to 20 minutes or more in the shower and since most showers use between 5 and 10 gallons of water per minute, that usage can add up in a hurry. In reality, there's no hard and fast rule. 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 hot at full blast.

SHAVING AND BRUSHING YOUR TEETH

Don't leave the water running. Turn the tap off until you need some more. Unused running water going down the drain adds up to a lot of wasted water.

SAVING IN THE KITCHEN

DISHWASHERS

Automatic dishwashers average about 12 gallons per operation. Make sure the washer is fully loaded whether there's a dinner full of dishes or just a couple of cups. If there is no dishwasher in your household, when you wash the dishes, don't keep the water running. A sinkful of wash water and one of rinse water is sufficient to do the job. Also, store a jug of ice water in the refrigerator for when you will want an occasional cold drink of water. Water is wasted by letting it run to get cold.

LAUNDRY

Many washing machines use 40 or more gallons of water per load. Save up for a full load and make your water work efficiently. Also 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 slow drip can add up to 15 or 20 gallons a day, and a 1/16 inch faucet leak can waste hundreds of 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. Most good household do-it-yourself books offer easy to understand directions. A good hardware or plumbing supply store will have necessary replacement parts and can probably direct you to a good instruction source or plumber if the repairs are more extensive.

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. 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; check to see if they work. Most importantly, check for the main shut-off valve that turns off the water supply. It's located near the water meter. It is the homeowner's responsibility to maintain those valves in working condition. If they fail to operate, contact a plumber to stop by and correct the situation.

THE OUTDOORS

During warm weather months, a significant amount of the water piped into homes is used to irrigate lawns and gardens. It's a common source of higher than expected bills. But, you don't have to let your lawn turn brown or the car turn dusty to be efficient in your water use. A basic principle of lawn and garden watering is not to give them more than they need. Avoid a fixed schedule and water the grass or plants as they show signs of needing it. During a cool or cloudy spell, don't water as often. Heat and wind will rob your lawn of water before they can use it. Avoid watering on windy days to prevent most of the water to go where you don't want it. Water the lawn 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. Instead, water thoroughly and the lawn will develop deeper roots and won't need watering as often, as well as being more resistant to disease and wear.

Also, make sure when the sprinklers are on that they cover just the lawn or garden, not sidewalks, driveways or gutters. Your garden hose can pour out 600 gallons or more in only a few hours. Leaving the sprinkler to run all day and unattended can result in using thousands of gallons. 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 waste of water is using the water hose to sweep away dirt and debris from driveways, porches and sidewalks. Instead, use a rake and broom for outdoor sweeping.

WATER EFFICIENCY...RESPONSIBLE AND RESPECTFUL

Practicing water efficiency will help all our efforts to keep the costs of water manageable. It is also a responsible and respectful way of treating our environment and to preserve our fresh water resources for our children and grandchildren.