

WATER₁

Introduction

Canadians are diverting, polluting, and depleting our finite supply of freshwater. Only 1% of Great Lakes water is renewed annually.¹ One in four Canadian municipalities reported water shortages.²



Per Capita Withdrawal of Freshwater		
Country	Year	(Cubic metres/p/yr)
USA	2000	1,600
Canada	1996	1,386
Germany	2001	460
Sweden	2002	296
UK	1994	197
Denmark	2002	123

If you combine residential, industrial, commercial, and agricultural water uses, Canada is one of the highest users of freshwater in the world.

Here's some of the ways that we waste

water in our homes:

1. In 2006, more than ½ of homeowners and more than ¾ of renters did not have a water saving toilet.³
2. In 2006, more than 1/3 of homeowners and over ½ of renters did not use a low-flow shower head.⁴
3. We run the tap while brushing our teeth. (= several litres of fresh water)
4. We water the lawn instead of using rain barrels.
5. We flush when it's only #1 (=gallons of fresh water gone)
6. We turn on the dishwasher half full (=water, detergent & hydro waste)
7. We bathe instead of showering (=triple the water use)

What You Can Do

You're only a flush away!

The next time you flush your toilet, think about how much water you use each time. On average, each of us uses well over 100 litres of water a day just flushing the toilet! Toilets account for 30% of your total indoor water use. Combined with showers and baths, the bathroom represents about 65% of your home's total indoor water use.⁵

If your toilet is more than ten years old, it's probably a water waster. New flapperless toilets flush with as little as 4.8 litres per flush, and they avoid leakage from faulty flappers. Replacing your old toilet can reduce your water use by between 60% and 85% per flush.

Go Beyond the Flush Toilet

The invention and widespread use of the flush toilet took society down the wrong path. The flush toilet is not only an enormous waste of water and serious water treatment problem, it sends human waste down the drain, wasting a precious resource which for centuries has been used to maintain the fertility of our soils. The widespread composting of human waste as an alternative to the flush toilet is being introduced in Sweden, USA,

1 International Joint Commission (IJC): "Protection of the Waters of the Great Lakes"

2 Environment Canada, 2002

3 Statistics Canada, Who uses water-saving fixtures in the home? William David Gibbons, Income Statistics Division, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/16-002-x/2008003/article/10686-eng.htm>

4 Ibid.

5 Environment Canada, Water-Wise Tips for Bathrooms, http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/info/pubs/brochure/e_IWDWW3.htm

and China.⁶ We should do the same.

Un-bottle It

The extensive use of bottled water in recent years has created an enormous garbage problem, sending billions of bottles unnecessarily to landfill. Bottling water also creates serious water and environmental issues, making drinking water expensive and less safe, creating water shortages by draining underground aquifers, disrupting watersheds and ecosystems, and wasting fossil fuel. The alternative is our tested and inexpensive public water system. We need to ban the use of bottled water, and reintroduce public drinking fountains.

Use rain barrels instead of your garden hose

The water from the roof of your house is great for watering your garden. It saves water and money. Rain barrels can be purchased from most hardware stores.

(See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2f-CwmlZYaY> for a video describing how to install a rain barrel.)

Take sailor showers!

Take shorter showers whenever possible. If your shower is equipped with a shut-off valve, turn off the water while you are soaping and shampooing, then rinse off quickly – this is called a sailor shower.

Control your water flow

Replace your showerhead with a new low-flow model. Look for one with a flow rate of 9.5 litres per minute (2.1 gallons per minute). Also, install aerators on your faucets. Most CSA-approved showerheads and faucets will have their flow rates stamped on them, in either litres per minute or gallons per minute.

Don't let your water run away on you

When washing, brushing your teeth, or shaving, never let the tap run continuously. Fill a glass with water for mouth rinsing while brushing your teeth. Rinse your razor by filling the bottom of the sink with a few centimetres of warm water.

Be a leak seeker!

To check for leaks in your toilet tank, put a little food colouring in the tank. If, without flushing, the colour begins to appear in the bowl you have a leak that should be repaired immediately. Regularly check faucets, pipes, and the base of your toilet for leaks, and repair promptly.

Further Information:

- Go Green Together, www.gogreentogether.ca
- Environment Canada, http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/info/pubs/brochure/e_broch.htm
- *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*, Maude Barlow, McClelland and Stewart, 2007
- *Our Water Commons*, Maude Barlow, Council of Canadians, <http://www.onthecommons.org/topic.php?topic=121>
- The Council of Canadians: www.canadians.org or www.unbottleit.org
- Flow: For Love of Water (a film by Irena Salina) <http://www.flowthefilm.com/>

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⁶ Plan B 3.0, *Mobilizing to Save Civilization*, Lester Brown, 2008, p. 203