



DROP BY DROP: USE WATER WISELY

Water is an important natural resource. We use it everyday at home and at work in so many ways that we take it for granted. However, water is no longer the “sure thing” that it was in the past. We need to reassess our attitude about water and how to conserve it. This fact sheet is about water conservation and what we can do to reduce our water use.

In 1900, each of the six million people living in Pennsylvania used about five gallons of water per day. Since then, our population has doubled to almost 12 million people and our water consumption has increased to an average of 62 gallons per day.

Part of this 900 percent increase in water use is due to the many modern water-using conveniences in our homes, such as automatic dishwashers, clothes washers, garbage disposals and home water treatment systems. A significant change in water use occurred when the bathroom was moved indoors. It is ironic that we use one of our most precious resources to remove waste from our homes.

Our water resources are not unlimited. They are affected every day by precipitation, population growth, economic development and pollution. Because water is a resource that must be shared, competition for its use is an ever-increasing management problem. In the past, we tried to solve our supply problems by constructing storage facilities and developing new resources such as wells and reservoirs. However, these measures can be both economically and environmentally costly.

A more cost-effective way to protect our water resources is through sound water resources management and conservation.

Average Daily Water Use

Be aware of how much water you use! Awareness is the first step in conservation.

Metered Water

If your water use is metered, review your water bill. Divide your water usage by the number of days in the billing period and also by the number of residents in your household. If your water is measured in cubic feet, convert to gallons by multiplying by 7.48.

Unmetered Water

If your water use is not metered, you must determine your water use for each fixture. Flow rates for showers and faucets can be measured by using a container and watch to measure the amount of water discharged through the fitting in a minute. Toilet use per flush can be approximated by measuring the volume of water inside the toilet tank (width x length x height) and dividing by 231. (There are 231 cubic inches in a gallon of water.) After you have determined the water use of each fixture, you will need to record the number of uses and the length of time each fixture is used to determine your average daily water use. Remember to estimate the amount of water used by appliances such as clothes washers and dishwashers as well as home water treatment systems.

After determining your average daily water use, it is important to compare your and/or your family's water use to the statewide residential/water use average of 62 gallons per person per day (GPCD). Is your and/or your family's water use average more or less than 62 GPCD? If it is less than 62 GPCD, you and your family are doing a good job conserving water. However, if your or your family's water use averages more than 62 GPCD, serious consideration should be given to the following suggestions:

- Installing low-flow plumbing fixtures
- Purchasing water-saving appliances
- Checking for household leaks
- Changing water use habits

Water Savings

Water-saving plumbing fixtures and appliances are cost effective, providing permanent long-term economic advantages. Low flow toilets, showerheads and faucet aerators save valuable water and energy used to heat water without requiring a change in personal use habits.

Repair All Leaks

A dripping faucet is more than annoying; it's expensive. Even small leaks can waste significant amounts of water. Hot water leaks are not only a waste of water, but also of the energy needed to heat the water.

Leaks inside a toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water a day. Toilet leaks can be detected by adding a few drops of food coloring to water in the toilet tank. If the colored water appears in the bowl, the tank is leaking. If you have a leaking faucet or toilet, stop pouring money down the drain and repair it.

Use Water-Saving Plumbing Fixtures/Appliances

Bathroom

- Since passage of the Federal Energy Act in January 1994, all new manufactured toilets use 1.6 gallons per flush. If your present toilet was manufactured before 1994, consider placing a plastic gallon container in the tank toilet to save water with each flush.
- Install low-flow showerheads that use no more than 2.5 gallons per minute at maximum flow.
- Install low-flow faucets that use no more than 2.2 gallons per minute at maximum flow.

Kitchen/Laundry

- Replace the more common, less efficient, top loading clothes washer with a high-efficiency, front-loading washer that uses about 30 percent less water and 40 to 50 percent less energy.
- Operate clothes washer and dishwasher only when they are fully loaded.
- Use the proper washer level or load size selection on clothes washers.
- Install low-flow aerators on all faucets.

Change Water Use Habits

In addition to installing low-flow plumbing fixtures, purchasing water-saving appliances and repairing leaks, water use can be reduced by changing your water use habits inside and outside the home.

Water Saving Tips Inside the Home

- Turn the faucet off while brushing your teeth. Use a glass of water for rinsing your teeth.
- When shaving, use a sink filled with rinse water. Do not let the faucet flow.
- Take short showers instead of baths and consider bathing small children together.
- Do not use the toilet as a trash can.
- If the shower has a single hand control or shut off valve, turn off the flow while soaping or shampooing.
- Refrigerate a bottle of drinking water instead of letting a faucet flow until the water is cold enough to drink.
- Turn the faucet off while cleaning vegetables. Rinse them in the sink with the drain closed or in a pan of water.
- If you wash dishes by hand, do not leave the faucet flowing for rinsing. Instead, use a dish rack and spray device to rinse them. If you have two sinks, fill one with soapy water and one with rinse water.
- Fill the sink with water to prerinse dishes before putting them in the dishwasher.

Water Saving Tips Outside the Home

- Use a broom, not a hose, to clean driveways, steps and sidewalks.
- Wash the car with water from a bucket. If a hose is used, control the flow with an automatic shut off nozzle.
- Water the lawn only when needed. If grass does not spring back after walking on it, it probably needs water.
- Water the lawn or garden during the coolest part of the day. Do not water on windy days.
- Set sprinklers to water the lawn or garden only. Do not water the street or sidewalk.
- Use soaker hoses and trickle irrigation systems to reduce the amount of water used for irrigation by 20 to 50 percent.
- Use mulch around shrubs and garden plants to reduce evaporation from the soil surface and cut down on weed growth.
- In landscaping, use native plants that require less care and water than ornamental varieties.
- Cover the swimming pool to prevent evaporation.
- Adjust the lawn mower to a higher setting to provide natural ground shade and to promote water retention by the soil.

For more information, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us, keyword: Water Conservation.