

The Sensible Environmentalist

Water Efficiency Cuts Utility Bills

DEAR DR. MOORE:

Each summer seems to bring more water shortages. Are we heading for a national crisis?

Many parts of the U.S. have experienced water shortages because of drought, but it isn't just a climate issue. It also has to do with rising populations, increasing demand and the cost of expanding supply and treatment systems, assuming there's enough water to make that possible. A group of mayors recently conducted a survey and found that 40% of their cities won't have an adequate water supply in 20 years. We may not be in a full blown crisis yet, but it's on its way—and now is the time to do something about it.



Dr. Moore

There are many ways to become more water efficient and we need to make this a priority. By using less, we help to keep rivers and other aquatic environments at healthy levels, reduce pressure on supply and treatment facilities, and cut energy use. For homeowners, using less water can also save hundreds of dollars a year.

According to the World Water Council, North Americans use more water per capita than everyone except the Japanese: about 90 gallons a day, compared to the European average of 53 gallons. Wasteful practices (such as leaving the tap on when we brush our teeth or shave) comprise 14% of that amount. That's more than 12 gallons a day, per person, treated to drinking

quality standards and often heated—that's lost down the drain.

Aside from improving our personal habits, one of the easiest ways to save water is to repair leaks—including running toilets (which can waste up to 200 gallons a day), faucets and outdoor sprinklers. Check the level on your water meter and then don't use any water for two hours. If the reading is different afterwards, you have a leak.

Among the many ways to save:

- Install high efficiency appliances. A washing machine that's Energy Star certified uses up to 50% less water per load than one that isn't, while a high efficiency toilet can save up to 25,000 gallons a year.
- Reduce water flow with low-flow faucet aerators and showerheads.
- Run the dishwasher only when it's full.
- Plant a garden that's suited to the local climate and doesn't need a lot of water.
- Sweep instead of hosing down your driveway.

These are all common sense ideas, which is why water efficiency represents such a tremendous opportunity to make a difference.

We may not be able to prevent water shortages, but we can slow their progress—and quite possibly reduce their impact.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com