

Doing your part

10 ways to be more water wise

Water is one of our most precious resources. It is vital to our lives and to our livelihoods. But the supply is not endless. We need to continue protecting it by reducing water use and preventing pollution.

Water can be wasted and polluted in many different ways, both through industrial uses and at home. How many of us stop to consider the old paint we wash down the drain? Or the household chemicals we use that end up in sewers?

Everyone who discharges waste water into the environment is responsible for its quality whether it's from a private home or a large municipal or industrial treatment centre. By using our water supplies wisely, we can save on water and wastewater services costs and help the environment.

Around the house

1. STOP! Don't pour it out

Take old cleaning products, paints, solvents, pesticides and used oil to your local household hazardous waste depot. Never pour them down the drain or into a sewer because in many cases the toxic ingredients pass right through the sewage treatment plant and into the lake or river.

2. Use natural cleaning products

Whenever possible, replace hazardous household cleaning products with those that are biodegradable and less toxic. Instead of harmful chemicals, use baking soda, vinegar, salt and lemon juice, mixed with water, to keep your home clean and smelling fresh. Select detergents that are phosphate-free. Phosphates are nutrients that can harm lakes and waterways by causing excessive growth of undesirable weeds or algae.

3. Reduce (be water watchful)

Make small changes to water use habits and you can reduce substantially the amount of water you use.

Bathroom: Keep showers to five minutes or less. Take fewer baths and fill the tub with only as much water as you really need — in most cases, one quarter full. Use a glass to rinse your toothbrush. Rinsing a toothbrush under the tap wastes about 4,000 litres of water a year.

Kitchen: To rinse vegetables and fruits, use a little water in the sink or a bowl instead of running water. Defrost frozen foods in the refrigerator or the microwave, not under running water. Keep a pitcher of water in the refrigerator so you don't have to run the tap for each glass of water. When hand washing dishes, plug the drain and do them all at once. Run dishwasher with full loads only.

Laundry: Run your washing machine with full loads only and on the shortest possible cycle. For small loads, adjust the water level. Gather all items for hand washing together and wash them at one time.

4. Repair (check for leaks)

Add two drops of food coloring to your toilet tank and don't flush. Wait 15 minutes. If coloring appears in the toilet bowl, there's a leak. Replace all leaky tap washers, or call a plumber if the problem persists. Leaking valves and faucets can waste more than 400 litres of water a day. To find other water leaks you can't see, begin by reading your water meter last thing at night. Then read the meter in the morning before using any water. A changed reading usually means there's a water leak.

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Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that Ontario's waters are drinkable, swimmable and fishable. Governments can set standards and monitor quality, but it's up to all of us to preserve and protect this invaluable resource for generations to come.
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5. Retrofit (save money)

Replacing your regular toilet with a water-efficient one and installing low-flow shower heads and faucet aerators will also help conserve water and reduce energy and water bills.

6. Recycle (be inventive)

If you must run the tap, save the excess water to use for watering plants or soaking kitchen pots.

7. Pump the tank

If you are on a septic system, check to see that it is working properly and that it's big enough to handle household needs. Pump the tank out when necessary and have the system inspected every two years.

Outdoors

8. Don't overwater

Your lawn doesn't need much water to thrive - a thorough soaking (about one inch) of rain or water every three to five days is plenty. This will produce deep roots and stronger grass. Daily watering results in shallow roots and weaker grass. Set an empty can near the sprinkler to measure the amount of water used. Avoid using sprinklers with fine mist sprays, where the water evaporates faster. Water the lawn in the early morning for best results. Don't water it in the evening when prolonged dampness can cause disease and fungus. Avoid watering on windy days. Cutting your grass higher also reduces evaporation and increases moisture. Use a rain barrel to catch water for watering plants and flowers.

9. Recycle grass clippings

Your lawn will need less water if grass clippings are left on it and mixed in. Grass recycling not only saves time and reduces waste, it leads to a healthier, more disease and insect-resistant lawn. Grass clippings and leaves also help keep moisture around the roots of trees and bushes.

10. Stoop and scoop

Always pick up after your pet. Pet droppings can be carried by storm water into lakes and rivers. This adds to the bacterial pollution that sometimes closes our beaches.

For more information on water conservation please contact the:

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