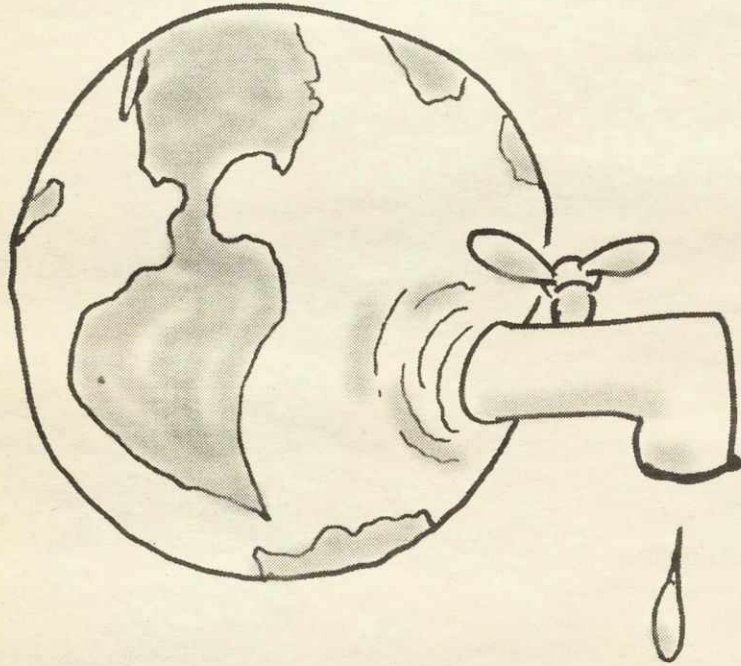


SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

Water shortage: a global crisis?



BY MELANIE WRIGHT

Safe water is becoming a scarce commodity in some parts of the world. But increasing pollution and decreasing water tables globally makes safe water an issue for all the earth's six billion people.

According to the Environmental News Service, a child dies every eight seconds from a water related disease, while 80 percent of diseases in developing countries are due to contaminated water. Also, an approximate 20 percent of freshwater fish species have been pushed to the edge of extinction because of water contamination.

These statements are just a sample of the effects of water pollution, and its impact on various forms of life.

To understand the 'water crisis' one must know where our water comes from, and how the supply may be harmed. Approximately two thirds of the world's freshwater is underground. It is found in spaces between sand, silt, gravel and bedrock. Ground water is actually safer to consume than surface water, because the water is filtered through the ground.

According to Environment Canada, groundwater supplies are depleted when the net amount of water pumped is greater than the net replenishing of the reservoir's water. Groundwater becomes contaminated when anthropogenic sources of pollution such as road

salt, nitrates in chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides and leaching of landfill toxins (just to name a few) enter the water source and dissolve. Thus, it is easy to see how the materials used in everyday life by people, businesses and industries affect the water we use.

A recent conference of international organizations was held in Switzerland with the purpose of attempting to find solutions to water problems. They noted a dramatic increase in the demand for water, especially in developing countries.

Based on United Nations population projections, and assuming that renewable resources will remain unchanged, 34 countries are expected to experience serious strains on their water supplies by the year 2025. Currently about 29 countries suffer moderate to severe water scarcity.

According to United Nations speaker H. van Ginkel, demands for water are "increasing at twice the population growth rate...driven by a rising global standard of living and increasing food production."

Without a doubt, the world's water supply is threatened. There are many predictions and concerns on the future of safe water. But with the largest accessible supply of freshwater in the world, how much does this crisis affect the typical Canadian?

According to Dalhousie Biology professor Bill Freedman, the extent of the water crisis is not an exaggeration. He states many reasons for water shortages. In Canada, most water supply problems occur in the Prairies, as it is a drier region. Yet, local water shortages are a seasonal problem, and as with other areas the supply could diminish over time. Professor Freedman says that most water

waste is a result of industrial processes and agricultural irrigation techniques.

Freedman indicates that this not only affects humans, but also threatens wildlife. Birds and fish are among those most directly affected by poor water quality and availability. For instance, when irrigated water from farms is dumped into lakes and water systems, the nutrients destroy the lake by causing an choking overabundance of algae (a process called eutrophication).

As we can see, the water crisis is a pervasive problem. It is impossible for anyone to escape dealing with this issue since everyone has to share the water. Interest groups, lobbyists and activists are one vehicle for change in environmental policy, in so far as reducing pollution, and industrial wasting of water. Yet, there is still the issue of residential water wasting.

Individuals can conserve water by implementing changes in their own homes. In the kitchen you can fix leaky taps; don't run water continuously when doing dishes and make sure the dishwasher is full before using it.

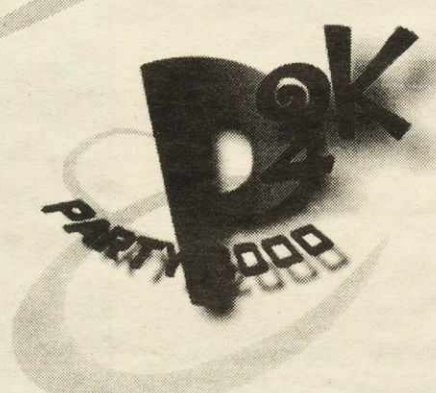
Some bathroom hints are; fill the sink half full instead of letting the tap run when you wash or shave, don't run the water when you brush your teeth, take short showers and don't flush garbage down the toilet.

Another good idea is to try and use environmentally friendly products when cleaning. Hopefully, a better understanding of the problems associated with water pollution and waste will encourage more people to participate in conservation. Although the 'water crisis' may not be apparent for the average Canadian, it is an increasing problem around the globe.

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