

Our attitudes towards water

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What do most Canadians think about their long-term fresh water supply? Overall the concern has remained high the last two years at 84% for the nation, and 86% of British Columbians. But what does this mean for how people think about water, use it, and are willing to take action to conserve it?

That is what RBC and Unilever set out to discover in the 2009 Canadian Water Attitudes Study. In the chart above are just a few of the highlights.

There were the usual points about Canadians not realizing how much water we use per day. On average Canadians estimate they use 66 litres per day per person, but once they realize the Canadian average is actually 329 litres, 90% of Canadians are concerned (93% in British Columbia).

Interestingly enough, the most popular idea to personally reduce consumption was to take less or shorter showers. Other ideas included low-flush toilets, doing only full loads of laundry, reduction of lawn or driveway watering, collecting and reusing rain water and grey water to water lawns, and many other actions we often are encouraged to take.

Despite the fact that most people know the importance of conserving water, and are fully aware of a whole range of simple ideas, the actions are not being implemented. Ninety-seven percent of Canadians know to avoid the unnecessary use of water. Ninety-one percent know to use a bucket instead of a hose to wash their car, but only 74% of people actually follow through. The move to brown lawns is a little more successful, with 91% thinking this is important, and 84% actually following through.

Asked what would help them conserve more water, one-third suggested more education. Other tools such as bylaws, incentives, rebates, higher charges all received a small percentage of response. An actual water shortage was rated equal to these other encouragements.

And for those looking to help your business, water conservation can do more than save you money. Fourteen percent of British Columbians have stopped doing business with a corporation, because the company used water irresponsibly. The interesting flip-side, is that 22% of British Columbians have chosen to start doing business with a corporation, because they were careful about their water.

So what's the point of all these numbers? We are not alone. Our water issues and our water habits are a national concern. This study is an indicator of what our friends and neighbours are feeling about our water supply, and how we use it.

Knowing these facts will help. Those days when I am wishing to have a 20-minute shower or wash my car, I'm going to remind myself about the other more than 85% of British Columbians thinking about and conserving water. It won't make it any more fun, but it certainly will make it easier.

Water Limited explores issues of water management in the community. It is funded by the Georgia Basin Living Rivers Program and Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society. MVIHES coordinates the Englishman River Watershed Recovery Plan, and conducts education, restoration and monitoring projects. It also works to support healthy watersheds and shorelines.

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