

## The Okanagan gets water wise



By Kelowna Capital News

Published: **July 10, 2014 11:00 AM**

Updated: **July 10, 2014 11:1911 AM**

An El Niño taking shape on the Pacific might help ease conditions in California, but 77 per cent of the state is bone dry, listed as experiencing extreme or exceptional drought conditions.

It's these low water years that scientists and politicians around the world are trying to prepare for as climate change rocks our understanding of what life looks like on this planet.

"You look at what's happening in California, you look at what's happened in Australia and you see that the places where people have succeeded are the places where people were proactive and set up in advance...(It's the) places that had metering, places that had water conservation programs," said Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Wednesday morning mayors from up and down the valley gathered on the lawn of the H2O Centre in the Mission to pledge to save water and draw attention to the very critical need to conserve in this region.

Come summer, residents from one end of the valley to the other burn through an average of 1000 litres of water per person each day. Compared to the year-round average of 329 litres per person nationally, it's an exorbitant amount. And the level of consumption is particularly alarming when one considers the role agriculture plays in the valley and the how critical water is to its success.

Where does our water go?

"We mostly use it outside and we mostly put it on our lawn," said Doug Findlater, Mayor of West Kelowna.

"There is actually less water per person in the valley than anywhere else in Canada," he added. It's a little-known tidbit drawn from work Statistics Canada water data.

The Okanagan does experience drought.



While we are not in a drought year at the moment, the water shortages are frequent and measured by the lake level, which is closely monitored by Environment Canada and the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resources, which makes the decision on how low to let the lake drop.

A dry year can impact any community along the basin from Armstrong to Osoyoos, but it's most likely to hit downstream, often leaving communities over the border struggling.

"Every three to five years, we have a drought and you can't really tell when it's going to be an extreme drought," explained Warwick Sears, whose job it is to help the Okanagan prepare.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board has thus issued a [challenge](#) to residents to pledge to conserve water and they're offering up a \$5000 prize for one individual who takes the time to register with their water conservation program, [Make Water Work](#).

The pledges include simple measures like aerating and fertilizing the lawn so it uses less water, and watering at dawn and dusk to avoid evaporation.

Small measures like this work. The City of Kelowna has reduced its water consumption by 20 per cent per capita since 1998, Kelowna city councillor Luke Stack said as he made his own pledge.

Unfortunately, as more people flow into the valley, this does not mean water consumption dips.

Where we tend to spend our water resources is a costly affair—both for the environment and for taxpayers.

"Most of the water is put onto our grass, which is really amazing when you think we take it out of our streams and out of our lake and we pipe it and we purify it and then we put it onto the grass," said Stack. "We need to look at ways to reduce that."

He pledged only to use water on his plants, and not the concrete sidewalks beside, and to reduce the outside landscaping on the buildings his non-profit, Society of Hope, runs by putting more emphasis on xeriscaping.

All of the mayors asked that local residents put a concerted effort into minimizing their water use in the coming months, particularly as we enter this very dry time of year.

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.kelownacapnews.com/news/266627521.html>