

Celebrate Drinking Water Week and help keep Okanagan waters clean

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May 1 to 7 is Drinking Water Week in B.C. In recognition of this week, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has proclaimed Drinking Water Week in the Okanagan, encouraging people to “Get to know your H₂O.” As citizens of the beautiful Okanagan, it’s important we recognize its beauty and value, and help conserve and protect it.

We all share the same water in the Okanagan. All the waters of the Okanagan Basin – from the creeks and lakes, to the hidden waters underground – are connected, from Armstrong to Osoyoos.

Unlike Vancouver and Victoria, the Okanagan doesn’t close off areas around its drinking water supplies. Instead, we are allowed to use the areas for recreation, this includes our big lakes in the valley bottom and the small ones up in the hills. So it’s important to understand that anytime we’re near water in the Okanagan, we are near someone’s drinking water and we need to be careful.

One of the biggest problems facing our drinking water is recreation, whether it’s motor boats, houseboats, or other motorized vehicles. The waters are vulnerable to gas spills and leaks, and sewage spills.

Smaller, shallower lakes are even more sensitive, because there is less water to dilute any pollution. Cattle, horses, and even pets that relieve themselves in or near our water sources can also cause harmful bacteria growth that gets into our drinking waters. Motorized trail riding through creeks and streams and on the shores of small lakes stirs up dirt, and can take animal waste into the water which, again, affects the quality of someone’s drinking water.

Another issue in the large lakes is stormwater pollution. Almost everything that enters storm sewers, including chemicals, dirt, cigarette butts, and other debris, goes directly into our creeks and lakes. This can hurt fish and other creatures that call these waters home, as well as our drinking water.

There is only one water in the Okanagan. We swim in it, we play in it, we depend on it for our food production, and we drink it. Protecting our lakes and streams is good for our environment, but it also reduces the cost of treating our drinking water.

We all share “One Valley. One Water.” It is up to each of us to do our part to protect this most precious resource, today and for future generations.

A number of Okanagan communities are holding Drinking Water Week events, including open houses at their water treatment plants. Celebrate with us! Learn more at www.okwaterwise.ca.

Okanagan WaterWise Tips to keep our water clean:

In nature...

- When enjoying the back country, by foot, on horseback or ATV, stick to maintained trails in approved areas, and avoid going near or through streams and creeks.
- Avoid using soap in the backcountry (even biodegradable ones). The chemicals can harm fish and aquatic plants and cause algae blooms. If you use soap for camping dishes, dump the soapy water far from any waterway. The ground will filter the soap before the dishwater makes its way back into our water system.
- Keep pets away from streams to prevent animal waste and silt from polluting the water.
- Leave no trace behind. Take out what you take in.

In your yard...

- Wash vehicles at a car wash that recycles its water. If you must wash at home, use a trigger nozzle, do not waste water and wash the car over grass. Your lawn will remove most chemicals before the water makes its way back to our lakes and streams.
- Sweep your sidewalk and driveway. Hosing washes pollutants into storm drains and streams.
- Reduce or eliminate use of fertilizers and pesticides on your lawn and garden.

- By Toby Pike

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