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Jul 13 2012 Valley-wide initiative on water conservation begins

Okanagan News

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Residents of the Okanagan share one valley and one water. We also have less water here than anywhere in Canada, but we use more – at least two times more than the average Canadian.

Come summer time, our water use soars – just when we also need water for food and for fish. Recognizing these realities, local governments in the valley have joined forces with the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its outreach program Okanagan WaterWise to launch Make Water Work – a valley-wide outdoor water conservation initiative, aimed at encouraging residents to be waterwise.



(Photo: Contributed)

The campaign includes radio ads, print ads in local newspapers, billboards and bus shelters, a special page on the Okanagan WaterWise website (www.makewaterwork.ca), a social media component on Facebook and Twitter, and more. The Make Water Work message can be seen and heard in every Okanagan community between Armstrong and Osoyoos.

"The campaign has been a collaborative effort, working with folks from each of these local governments to get the messaging just right," said Corinne Jackson, OBWB Communications Director and manager of the Okanagan WaterWise program. "Our goal is to encourage residents to be more wise with their outdoor water use. We're not telling people not to water, just follow some simple tips to get the most from your water," added Jackson, noting that the campaign is really aimed at lawn watering. At least 24 per cent of all Okanagan water is used by residents outdoors, mostly on lawns, she explained.

The campaign includes tips such as: "Don't mow. Let it grow. Water stays longer when grass is longer," encouraging residents to leave their grass 2-3 inches tall to slow evaporation. Other messages include: "Don't let water stand around. One inch a week will do." And "Put water on the nightshift. Water between dusk and dawn." More tips and information can be found on the website.

"It was an easy decision to jump in with this campaign," noted Doug Allin, Peachland's Director of Operations. "The idea of having consistent messaging in the valley was important to us." After all, no matter what Okanagan community you live in, the soil is similar, the yard-type is similar, and our watering habits are similar.

"Being more efficient with our water use will benefit all of us," said Allin.

The decision to join the campaign was also easy for the Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO), explained Jennifer Miles, the regional district's Water Sustainability Coordinator. Following the drought of 2010 there was resistance to strict water controls, prompting RDNO to create a drought response team to develop a plan to address water needs. The team includes several stakeholders including local businesses and large water users, such as the school district and hospital.

"Public education was one of the recommendations that came out of our drought response team," noted Miles, adding that there is recognition that promoting and adopting long-term waterwise habits is better than bringing in short-term water restrictions.

"At the same time, our region is very mobile," added Miles. "Okanagan residents who travel in the valley for work or the holidays are seeing the same message, reinforcing the fact that we really are part of 'One valley. One

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water.' Consistent messaging helps all of us reach the same goal - wise water use," said Miles.

"We had a wet spring, but the heat is beginning to hit us now," Jackson added. "The Okanagan has experienced drought in the past and research indicates the region is going to see more of this, with warmer winters, and longer, hotter summers. At the same time, BC Stats estimates the Central Okanagan's population is going to grow by 45 per cent within 25 years, with similar increases in the North and South Okanagan. All of this going to put greater pressure on our water resources. It makes sense to learn to conserve now," she added.

The Make Water Work campaign includes a contest with SunFM and West-Wind Nurseries & Landscaping (a local Irrigation Industry Association of BC-certified company). The contest ends this weekend! Okanagan residents are invited to take the Make Water Work pledge at www.makewaterwork.ca and enter to win \$2,000 in WaterWise yard upgrades! Residents can enter at www.makewaterwork.ca

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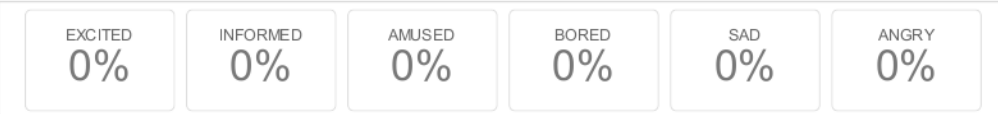
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