

KELOWNA

Time to recognize our wealth

Campaign starts Monday to raise water awareness

By STEVE MacNAULL
The Okanagan Sunday

We completely take it for granted. The "it," of course, being the water that comes out of our taps

— whenever we want — hot or cold.

"We don't put the appropriate value on water," says Anna Warwick Sears, the executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

"We think it's free and we waste it as such. But really the cost of delivering that water to your home — as much as you want — is hidden in your taxes and other fees."

Sears' comments come as the board prepares to celebrate World Water Week starting Monday with a lineup of events and campaigns to raise awareness of the value of water.

After all, water is essential to all life and enhances our lifestyle whether it's simply drinking a cool glass of water, adding it to your favourite recipe, waterskiing on the lake or enjoying a view of water from your home or on a hike.

"People in the Okanagan would look at and value water differently if they had to carry all the water they use a couple of miles in jugs like so many millions of other people have to throughout the world," says Sears.

While the Okanagan is truly blessed with abundant water and for the most part the resource is managed well, more

can be done, according to Sears.

"Yes, we have a beautiful 100-mile-long body of water in Okanagan Lake, but we don't want to empty it," she says.

"Our goal should be to use only the amount that can be replenished every year. In an average year that's not a problem. But there has to be awareness that with climate change there are going to be a lot of years that aren't average, and that means drought."

The Valley's water supply is inextricably linked to Okanagan Lake because all municipal and private water suppliers either draw the resource directly from the lake or from ground water associated with the lake.

The lake stays full from rain and snowpacks in the mountains that melt every year and flow into the lake through a network of creeks.

Twenty-five per cent of all water used in the Valley goes to keeping our lawns green.

As such, it's a prime place to save water.

You can still have a green lawn, but 20 minutes of irrigation or sprinklers can do the job — not three hours.

Irrigation for agriculture can also be on timed cycles.

While in the grand scheme of things turning off the tap while you brush your teeth or soap up in the shower doesn't save a lot of water, Sears says it's still worth doing as an exercise in conservation and awareness.

"Every drop of water you use has been treated and deemed safe and has to be delivered to you (by a water utility)," she points out.

"And after you use it, it has to be taken away (by a water utility) and treated again to make it clean."



De Burgos



STEVE MacNAULL/The Okanagan Sunday

Standing beside the Valley's greatest resource — 100-mile long Okanagan Lake — is Okanagan Basin Water Board executive director Anna Warwick Sears.

WATER WEEK EVENTS

• All week kids aged five to 15 can go online to okwaterwise.ca, do a scavenger hunt and enter to win a pool and pizza party for themselves and nine friends.

• All week Kelowna radio station AM1150's morning show is running a series of 10-minute interviews with experts on water, how important it is and how we can conserve. Monday at 7:20 a.m., Tuesday 8:20 a.m., Wednesday 8:50 a.m., Thursday 7:20 a.m. and Friday 7:20 a.m.

Monday

• The gallery in the Fine Arts building at UBC Okanagan launches its World Water Day exhibition of works all incorporating, of course, water from 1 to 4 p.m. The rest of the week the gallery will be open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Tuesday

• A free and open to the public barbecue at UBC Okanagan noon to 1:30 p.m. at the school's courtyard featuring short speeches, drum procession and live music.
• 2-4 p.m. at UBC Okanagan's library room 305, Oliver Brandes of the University of Victoria's water sustainability project speaks. Free admission and open to the public.
• 5-6:30 p.m. at the Bohemian Cafe in downtown Kelowna, a free public forum put on by the Okanagan Basin Water Board and UBC Okanagan.

Wednesday

• A water-themed poetry slam 2 p.m. at the university's Arts building atrium. Free and open to the public.
• Medical anthropologist Dr. Hugo De Burgos debuts his documentary *The Site of Lead*, a film about lead contamination in local water supplies in El Salvador, 7 p.m. at the university's Arts building room 366. Free and open to the public.