

Unique Economic Advantages in British Columbia Through the Conservation of our Water Resources.

One way British Columbia's business communities can lead the way in conserving our resources is through using water more efficiently. Water efficiency will also trigger new economic activities for water-related manufacturing and service sectors, encouraging new business opportunities and job creation. These opportunities create additional economic advantages by lowering costs to business and in generating clients in support of businesses that implement sustainable practices. The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment believes that improved water efficiency practices are essential to sustainable development.

Despite the apparent abundance of water in BC, our water supply is not as plentiful as we would like to think. Over 17% of our surface water sources have reached, or are nearing, their capacity to reliably supply water for extractive uses. Long-term trends of observation wells indicate that ground water levels are declining in some areas of the province and over one-third of our aquifers are vulnerable to contamination. While the water supply situation is not a serious problem for many communities, these figures tell us that the availability of a healthy, sustainable and plentiful water resource can no longer be presumed.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and development "Canada ranks a dismal 28th among the 29 nations of the OECD in terms of per capita water consumption. Only Americans use more water than Canadians. Since 1980, overall water use in Canada has increased by 25.7%. This is five times higher than the overall OECD increase of 4.5%. In contrast, nine OECD nations were able to decrease their overall water use since 1980 (Sweden, the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Poland, Finland and Denmark)." The Canadian trend can not be maintained in the long run and in British Columbia it is prudent that we take steps to conserve our natural resources while supporting a strong and vibrant economy.

In Canada, residential, commercial and institutional buildings represent more than a third of total greenhouse gas emissions (Roundtable on the Environment & Economy's "Energy-Related Green House Gas Emissions in Canada 2050 Report")—and the single largest opportunity to make progress towards Canada's 2020 target of 200 Mt (megatonnes) reduction in GHG. By 2015, the Canada Green Building Council aims to recognize 100,000 buildings and 1 million homes (new and existing) using 50% less energy and water than the 2005 baseline for their building type, while achieving exemplary environmental standards in the other LEED categories. Saving water through efficient new building techniques and through retrofitting existing buildings is one of many ways businesses can participate in water conservation.

It is critical to increase the productivity of the water that we do use. That means that we must be able to do more with each unit of water. Agriculture in BC accounts for the highest water usage, followed by industrial applications. By concentrating on improving our water productivity, we can assist in the continuation of a healthy economy. There are many ways in which we can employ our water more efficiently. It has been proven that water use efficiency measures are viable and beneficial.

The percentage of observation wells with declining water levels due primarily to human activities increased from 10% in 1965–1970 to 14% in 1995–2000. Declining water levels related to human activities are mostly a result of intensive local groundwater pumping for industry, agriculture and municipal water supplies and, in urbanized areas, decreased recharge due to impervious surfaces.

The Canadian government program “Every Drop Counts” has identified four main water efficiency categories that are currently available. These initiatives fall within the jurisdiction of municipal governments and/or public utilities and include:

1. Structural:

- metering
- water recycling systems
- wastewater re-use
- flow control devices
- distribution system pressure reduction
- water saving devices (efficient fixtures, appliances and retrofits)
- drought resistant landscaping (xeriscaping)
- efficient sprinkling/irrigation technology
- new process technologies
- plant improvements

2. Operational:

- leak detection and repair
- water use restrictions
- elimination of combined sanitary/storm sewers to reduce loadings on sewage treatment plants
- plant improvements

3. Economic:

- rate structures
- pricing policies
- incentives through rebates and tax credits
- other sanctions (fines)

4. Socio-political:

- public education
- information transfer and training
- regulatory (legislation, codes, standards and by-laws)

To conserve our water it is important to start managing our water more efficiently. Business communities can take an active role in managing water by gauging their consumption and by using the existing programs and resources available to them. By taking a stand for the conservation of water, British Columbia’s businesses can lead the way for their own economic sustainability and the sustainability of the province at large.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS:

That the provincial government:

- 1. make water conservation a priority and provide incentives to businesses that participate in water conservation;**
- 2. partner with municipal governments, businesses and other stakeholders to implement and develop cost effective strategies and goals for efficient water usage and conservation;**
- 3. where appropriate, as a first step urge all municipalities and regional districts to install a water metering system;**
- 4. develop a free auditing program to assist businesses in gauging their water usage and once the audit is complete, design a program of measures or actions based on the goals and objectives, opportunities for water efficiency improvements, costs and benefits, and other criteria specific to each organization;**
- 5. initiate and fund public awareness and education programs to British Columbia's business communities about water conservation practices currently available to them.**

Greater Vancouver Regional District; <http://www.qvrd.bc.ca/smartsteps/strategies.htm>

Canada Green Building Council; <http://www.cagbc.org/leed/initiative/index/articles251.htm>

Environment Canada http://www.ec.gc.ca/Water/en/info/pubs/action/e_action.htm

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development: <http://www.oecd.org/>

Water Conservation—Every Drop Counts
http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/info/pubs/FS/e_FSA6.htm

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