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It's hard to grab the public's attention when it comes to water

By [Jennifer Smith - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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What is it about water that automatically renders it the ugly sister of virtually every environmental problem going?

Unlike climate change, the oil crisis, the scourge of forest fires, pine beetle or acid rain (remember acid rain?), it's hard to get anyone's head around the idea that water is seriously threatened.

I think in our hearts we all know we need to protect and conserve water but there's really only a few diehards who will actually go out and buy the five-minute timer for their shower.

Many of us have installed low-flow fixtures, even curbed our lawn watering during particularly scorching months, yet ultimately we're still flushing our toilets with drinking water and pouring the spaghetti pot leftovers down the sink.

There's a new Ipsos Reid poll which shows us

just how bad Canadians have gotten on this front.

In a study commissioned by RBC and Unilever and endorsed by the Canadian Partnership Initiative of the United Nations Water for Life Decade, some 83 per cent of Canadians reported they are concerned about water conservation. And yet:

- 46 per cent of us leave the water running while we brush our teeth
- 44 per cent of us leave the water on to wash the dishes
- 19 per cent of us hose down our driveways
- One per cent of us even use the hose to melt snow in the spring (the definition of insanity).

This week when Bob Sandford visited UBCO he pointed out this study and, of course, some chipper student put up her hand and asked why the media consistently fail to report on water, but will use reams of paper product on climate change.

I hate these kinds of questions from students, largely because they're the very antithesis of what you're supposed to be doing in university—developing critical thinking skills.

I can remember the days when I too was brainwashed into asking the "yes, but is this not the fault of the right-wing, money-grubbing types in media who don't report on this because it's not sensational enough?" query.

It's a sure-fire way to win points with professors because it negates actually having to think about the issue, learn and find facts for

an argument.

And now that I've worked on this side of the fence, I can honestly tell you, there are academics who haven't the foggiest idea what is and is not reported in the news, or why, and so it's guaranteed they'll agree with your defence.

But the fact is we in the media spend a lot of ink on water.

In fact, here in Kelowna all of the media in town probably dedicate more inches of newsprint and minutes of airtime on water than to climate change, peak oil and soil conservation combined.

But I seriously doubt that if the Ipsos Reid study were on the front page of our paper with a headline so large it virtually obliterated the sun (thereby saving us from at least one other environmental disaster), anyone would read the story.

For some reason, murder sticks in our brains and fires never fail to catch our attention, but start talking about us dying of thirst and, well, the article is pretty much awash.

Sandford knows this.

He pointed out that the Ipsos Reid study that was referenced was written about in no less than 62 Canadian newspapers.

Trust me, there isn't a public relations or communications pro in town who wouldn't consider those kinds of numbers a victory.

World Water Day, at which Sandford was the speaker, has been on the front page of this

newspaper every year since the university started holding celebrations to mark its existence, to the best of my recollection.

The City of Kelowna works very hard at curbing our consumption, as does the area's Okanagan Basin Water Board, and many local academics I might add.

But even here, in the middle of a desert where many, many professionals have bent over backwards to make water conservation a sexy issue, we're drowning in water-wasting cedar hedges and condos which don't pay for their consumption.

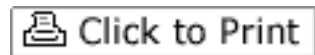
And I hate to point this out, but we also seem to have no problem planting grass on virtually every usable flat surface.

You should see the university's new grounds, for example. Not that anyone's pointing fingers.

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