



CANADA'S PULSE: Valley residents use more water than Canadian average

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Water shortages could be the single biggest thing to stand in the way of growth in the Okanagan over the next few decades if consumption habits aren't changed.

Valley residents currently use more than double the amount of water an average Canadian uses.

Anna Warwick Sears with the Okanagan Basin Water Board says the average local consumption is 675 litres per person per day.

Sears says the Canadian average is 329 litres per person per day.

According to an Ipsos Reid poll conducted for CHBC News, more than 60% of Okanagan residents are concerned the fresh water supply is going to run out.

Sears says one of the reasons the number may be so high is because residents are hearing about water problems in China and California.

For communities like Summerland where 85% of their water is used for agriculture, water waste was a serious issue before a water treatment plant was built.

For years, crops were being treated with drinking water but waste is now at a minimum since irrigation water has been separated from the drinking water supply.

Scott Lee, manager of water operations in Summerland, says officials knew from the beginning that building a water treatment plant to satisfy the district's demand was not a good idea.

Lee says it was an inherently bad idea to treat water to potable standards and then pour it onto apples, grapes and hayfields.

In a region that puts lawn aesthetics ahead of conservation, one method that has proven to make people think twice about their water usage is water meters.

Water meters used to be dirty words but attitudes have changed.

In the Ipsos Reid poll, almost 70% of Okanagan respondents were in favour of metered water.

Penticton has had water meters for decades and now uses much less water than the rest of the region.

Carolyn Stewart, water conservation coordinator for the City of Penticton, says the city uses approximately 520 litres per day while the rest of the Okanagan uses 675 litres per day.

Only a few communities still do not have meters but the Water Basin Board is working to get the entire valley metered.

Officials also say they are moving towards a zero landscaping policy.

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