
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



29 Hazen Drive, Concord, New Hampshire 03301 • (603) 271-3503 • www.des.nh.gov

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2010

Water Efficiency Practices for Domestic Indoor Water Use

Only 1 percent of the earth's water is available for drinking. The average American uses 100 gallons of water a day. Our excessive water use habits deplete potable drinking water supplies and return trillions of gallons of wastewater to streams and coastal waters. The following indoor water efficiency practices can save as much as 25,000 gallons of water per person per year. Water efficiency practices not only save water, they save money. For a description of how to determine water use in your home, see the following fact sheets at www.des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/dwgb/index.htm and scroll to WD-DWGB-26-15, "Performing a Domestic Water Use and Conservation Audit." To save water on outdoor use, see fact sheet WD-DWGB-26-3, "Water Efficiency Practices for Outdoor Water Use" at the same website.

General Water Efficiency Practices

The following water efficiency practices apply to general domestic water use. Bathroom, kitchen and laundry water use are addressed in later sections.

- Look for the WaterSense label when considering water using fixtures, appliances, and services. WaterSense, sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), labels water-efficient products that have been independently tested to ensure water savings without sacrificing performance or quality.
- Shut off water when not in use, such as when you brush your teeth or shave.
- Never put water down the drain when you can use it for something else, such as watering plants.
- Insulate water pipes and hot water heaters. This retains heat so that water doesn't need to run as long to get hot. It also saves on energy costs.
- Avoid water softening systems unless absolutely necessary. Backwashing these systems uses large quantities of water. If you do use a water softener, run the minimum amount of recommended regenerations to maintain softness.
- Turn off pumps, water softeners, and other water-using equipment while on vacation.
- Check for and repair leaks. Not only will you save water but you will save energy and money. A large percentage of energy costs can be attributed to pumping, treating, heating, and cooling water.
- If you are on municipal water and have a meter at your house, check the meter over a period of time when no one is using water. If the meter moves, you have a leak.
- If you have a well, the pump shouldn't run at times when no water is being used.

Water Efficiency Practices in the Bathroom

More than one fourth of all domestic indoor water consumption is used in the bathroom. The following water efficiency practices will help you save water in the bathroom.

- Install ultra-low flow toilets (ULF) that use a maximum of 1.28 gal/flush (4.8L/flush) or retrofit existing toilets with displacement bottles or dams. Dual flush toilets offer a choice between the 1.6-gallon flush for solid wastes and a 1.0-gallon flush for liquid only. Never put bricks in toilet tanks; they disintegrate over time. Use a squat, fat glass jar, like a pickle jar, no more than 6" high, filled with water. Glass is heavier than plastic and less apt to shift around in the tank.
- Install low-flow bathroom faucets that use no more than 1.5 gallons per minute or install low-flow faucet aerators or laminar flow restrictors. These devices are readily available at most hardware and building supply stores.
- Install low-flow showerheads that use no more than 2.0 gallons per minute. Low-flow showerheads are designed to use less water and still provide the same invigorating spray as their water-wasting counterparts.
- Don't use the toilet as a garbage disposal. Avoid unnecessary toilet flushing by disposing of tissues, cigarette butts and other items in the trash, and composting vegetable food waste.
- Replace or repair toilet flush handles that stick in the flush position.
- Avoid using automatic bowl cleaners in your toilet tank. These chemicals rapidly degrade flapper valves and other tank components, causing the toilet to leak.
- Adjust the toilet tank float level so that water fills no higher than 0.5"-1.0" below the top of the overflow pipe. At higher levels water can flow down the pipe and leak through to the bowl. The refill valve then tops off the tank, causing a continuous cycle of drain and fill.
- Detect leaks in toilet tanks by dropping food coloring in the tank (12 drops). Do not flush the toilet for at least an hour. If the tank leaks the dye will show up in the bowl.
- Fill bathtubs no more than half full.

Water Efficiency Practices in the Kitchen

The following water efficiency practices can be applied to routine kitchen chores.

- Operate dishwashers with full loads only. Use the water-save cycle if your dishwasher is equipped with one.
- If washing dishes by hand, rinse them in a basin rather than under running water.
- Store drinking water in the refrigerator rather than running the tap for cold water.
- Compost food scraps rather than using a garbage disposal. Not only do disposal units waste water; the fine particles they produce can clog a septic system.
- Consider installing an instant water heater on the kitchen faucet. This reduces the time needed to run water until it becomes hot.
- Do not run water to melt ice or thaw frozen foods. Defrost them in a microwave or in the refrigerator overnight.
- Rinse vegetables in a pan of water rather than under running water.

Water Efficiency Practices in the Laundry

The laundry is usually the second highest domestic indoor water use. The following water efficiency practices are designed to save water in the laundry.

- Wash full loads only. If unable to wash a full load, set your washer to the appropriate water level setting.
- Consider replacing your top-loading, vertical-axis washer with a more efficient horizontal-axis washer. Most of these are front-loading, but some newer models are also top-loading. These washers rotate clothes rather than agitating them and use much less water, an average of 20 gallons per load compared to an average of 43 gallons for conventional washers. See the EPA's Energy Star website listed at the end of this document for a catalog of Energy Star-approved washing machines.

For Additional Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or

dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov or visit our website at

<http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/index.htm>. All of the bureau's fact sheets are on-line at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/dwgb/index.htm>. More information about the DES Water Conservation Program can be found at http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/dwgb/water_conservation/index.htm.

Resources

Woodinville, WA Water District. In-depth water-saving tips, how to check for leaks.

<http://www.woodinvillewater.com/Conservation/District%20Program/District%20Program.htm>

US EPA. Listing of Energy Star rated washing machines. www.energystar.gov

References:

New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPC) *MRI Water Conservation Technical Bulletin #5, Water Conservation Best Management Practices for Domestic/Sanitary Water Use*; NEIWPC, Lowell, Mass.; 1996.

US Dept. of Defense, *MIL-Handbook-1165, Water Conservation*; US Dept. of Defense; 1997; pp 25-37.

Vickers, Amy; *Handbook of Water Use and Conservation*; WaterPlow Press, Amherst, Mass.; 2001; pp 23-75, 87-133.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of May 2010. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.