

# Water Conservation

## ***Fact Sheet***

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Many people have asked the American Red Cross for tips on conserving water for environmental reasons, as well as when drought conditions threaten. The following tips were developed by a coalition of specialists on water conservation in Florida, and are also consistent with the recommendations that were developed through the National Disaster Education Coalition's "Drought Forum":

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### **INDOOR USE**

#### **General**

- Never pour water down the drain when there may be another use for it. Use it to water your indoor plants or garden.
- Make sure your home is leak-free. When you are certain that no water is being used in your home, take a reading of the water meter. Wait 30 minutes and then take a second reading. If the meter reading changes, you have a leak!
- Repair dripping faucets by replacing washers. One drop per second wastes 2,700 gallons of water per year!

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#### **Bathroom**

- Check for toilet leaks by adding food coloring to the tank. If you have a leak, the color will appear in the bowl within 30 minutes. (Flush immediately to avoid stains.)
- If the toilet handle frequently sticks in the flush position letting water run constantly, replace or adjust it.
- Leaky toilets usually can be fixed inexpensively by replacing the flapper.
- Install a toilet displacement device to cut down on the amount of water needed for each flush. (Contrary to popular opinion a brick should **not** be used because it can dissolve and the loose pieces can cause damage to the internal parts. Instead, place a one-gallon plastic jug of water into the tank to displace toilet flow or purchase a device available at most hardware and home centers designed for this purpose.) Be sure installation does not interfere with the operating parts.
- Consider purchasing a low-volume toilet that uses less than half the water of older models. *NOTE: In many areas, low-volume units are required by law.*

- Take shorter showers.
  - Replace your showerhead with an ultra-low-flow version.
  - Place a bucket in the shower to catch excess water for watering plants.
  - In the shower, turn the water on to get wet; turn off to lather up; then turn the water back on to rinse. Repeat when washing your hair.
  - Don't let the water run while brushing your teeth, washing your face or shaving.
  - Avoid flushing the toilet unnecessarily. Dispose of tissues, insects, and other similar waste in the trash rather than the toilet.
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## **Kitchen**

- Operate automatic dishwashers only when they are fully loaded. Use the "light wash" feature if available to use less water.
  - When hand washing dishes, save water by filling two containers – one with soapy water and the other with rinse water containing a small amount of chlorine bleach.
  - Most dishwashers can clean soiled dishes very well, so dishes do not have to be rinsed before washing. Just remove large particles of food, and put the soiled dishes in the dishwasher.
  - Store drinking water in the refrigerator. Don't let the tap run while you are waiting for water to cool.
  - Do not use running water to thaw meat or other frozen foods. Defrost food overnight in the refrigerator, or use the defrost setting on your microwave.
  - Do not waste water waiting for it to get hot. Capture it for other uses such as plant watering or heat it on the stove or in a microwave.
  - Clean vegetables in a pan filled with water rather than running water from the tap. Re-use the water that vegetables are washed in for cleaning or watering plants.
  - Kitchen sink disposals require lots of water to operate properly. Start a compost pile as an alternate method of disposing of food waste, or simply dispose of food in the garbage.
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## **Laundry**

- Operate automatic clothes washers only when they are fully loaded or set the water level for the size of your load.

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**Long-Term Indoor Water Conservation**

- Retrofit all household faucets by installing aerators with flow restrictors.
- Consider installing an instant hot water heater on your sink
- Insulate your water pipes to reduce heat loss and prevent them from breaking if you have a sudden and unexpected spell of freezing weather.
- If you are considering installing a new heat pump or air-conditioning system, the new air-to-air models are just as efficient as the water-to-air type and do not waste water.
- Install a water-softening systems only when the minerals in the water would damage your pipes. Turn the softener off while on vacation.
- When purchasing a new appliance, choose one that is more energy and water efficient.

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**OUTDOOR USE****General**

- If you have a well at home, check your pump periodically. If the pump turns on and off while water is not being used, you have a leak.

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**Car Washing**

- Use a shut-off nozzle on your hose that can be adjusted down to a fine spray, so that water flows only as needed. When finished, turn it off at the faucet instead of at the nozzle to avoid leaks. Check hose connectors to make sure plastic or rubber washers are in place to prevent leaks.
- Consider using a commercial car wash that recycles water. If you wash your own car, park on the grass so that you will be watering it at the same time.

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**Lawn Care**

- Don't overwater your lawn. Lawns only need to be watered every five to seven days in the summer, and every 10 to 14 days in the winter. A heavy rain eliminates the need for watering for up to two weeks. Most of the year, lawns only need one inch of water per week. Buy a rain gauge so that you can better determine when to water.
- Water in several short sessions rather than one long one in order for your lawn to better absorb moisture. For example, water in ten-minute sessions spaced 30 minutes apart, rather than one straight 30-minute session.
- Water lawns during the designated hours.
- Position sprinklers so water lands on the lawn and shrubs and not on paved areas.
- Avoid sprinklers that spray a fine mist; most of the mist evaporates before it reaches the lawn. Check sprinkler systems and timing devices regularly to be sure they operate properly. Florida law now requires that "anyone who

purchases and installs an automatic lawn sprinkler system MUST install a rain sensor device or switch which will override the irrigation cycle when adequate rainfall has occurred.”

- Raise the lawn mower blade to at least three inches, or to its highest level. A higher cut encourages grass roots to grow deeper, shades the root system, and holds soil moisture.
- Avoid over fertilizing your lawn. Applying fertilizer increases the need for water. Apply fertilizers that contain slow-release, water-insoluble forms of nitrogen.
- Use a broom or blower instead of a hose to clean leaves and other debris from your driveway or sidewalk.
- Do not leave sprinklers or hoses unattended. A garden hose can pour out 600 gallons or more in only a few hours. Use a bell timer to remind yourself to turn sprinklers off.

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## **Pool**

- If you have a swimming pool, consider installing a new water-saving pool filter. A single backflushing with a traditional filter uses 180 to 250 gallons of water.
- Cover pools and spas to reduce evaporation of water.

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## **Long-Term Outdoor Conservation**

- Plant it smart. Plant native and/or drought-tolerant grasses, ground covers, shrubs and trees. Once established, they do not need water as frequently and usually will survive a dry period without watering. They also require less fertilizer or herbicides. Landscape with plants that are heat and drought tolerant and that do not require much water to live. Small plants require less water to become established. Group plants together based on similar water needs.
- Install irrigation devices that are the most water efficient for each use. Micro and drip irrigation and soaker hoses are examples of efficient devices.
- Use mulch to retain moisture in the soil. (Help preserve native cypress forests by selecting other types of mulch such as treated melaleuca.) Mulch also helps control weeds that compete with landscape plants for water.
- Avoid purchasing recreational water toys that require a constant stream of water.
- Avoid installing ornamental water features (such as fountains) unless they use recycled water.

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## **WITHIN THE COMMUNITY**

- Participate in public water conservation meetings conducted by your local government, utility or water management district.
- Follow water conservation and water shortage rules in effect. You are included in the restrictions even if your water comes from a private well.

- Encourage your employer to promote water conservation in the workplace.
- Patronize businesses that practice water conservation, such as restaurants that only serve water upon request.
- Report water losses (broken pipes, open hydrants, errant sprinklers, abandoned free-flowing wells, etc.) to the property owner, local authorities or your water management district.
- Encourage your school system and local government to help develop and promote a water conservation ethic.
- Support projects that will lead to an increased use of reclaimed wastewater for irrigation and other uses.
- Support efforts that create a concern for water conservation among tourists.
- Promote water conservation in community newsletters, on bulletin boards, and by example. Encourage your friends, neighbors, and co-workers to “be water smart.”
- Conserve water because it is the right thing to do – even when someone else is footing the bill, such as when you are staying at a hotel.
- Try to do one thing each day that will result in saving water. Every drop counts!

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## **WATER RESTRICTIONS**

In some communities where drought conditions exist, officials may recommend measures to restrict use of water. These recommendations may include such procedures as watering lawns and washing cars on odd or even days of the week, at night, or on weekends. The restrictions may limit hours or prohibit use of water, or require use of hand watering instead of using sprinkler systems that use much more water. You should check with your local authorities or water utility for information on water restrictions that may be imposed for your area.

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## **MORE INFORMATION**

Please contact your local water authority or utility district, or your local emergency management agency for information specific to your area.