



## Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Water Fact Sheet

92-1

# Water Efficiency at Home

**W**ater has always been one of Ohio's most abundant natural resources, but it's a resource we shouldn't take for granted. Water is used in a wide variety of human activities. We drink it, bathe in it, cook with it, clean with it. We use it to flush away our waste. It's needed to grow the crops and raise the animals we depend on for food and clothing, and for the trees with which we build our houses. We use it to generate electricity to power our technology. We use it to manufacture our cars and televisions; everything from the tallest skyscraper to the tiniest computer chip requires water to construct. We boat in it, ski in it, swim in it. We fish from it. And water is just as necessary in the natural environment; in fact, it is one of the basic building blocks of nature. Every living thing requires it, and no ecosystem can exist without it.

Water must be withdrawn from where it naturally occurs for many of the uses people make of it, but it must also remain where it naturally occurs for other human uses and to support the natural environment. If people withdraw too much, in-place uses may be jeopardized. To ensure adequate quantities to support all the uses for which water is needed, we should strive to make our water use as efficient as possible. Improving water efficiency means increasing the amount of benefit we get from each gallon we use. Here are some ways you and your family can improve water use efficiency right in your own home.

### Stop Wasting Water

When we use water without getting any benefit or when the benefit we get could be just as easily obtained without using water, we are simply wasting the resource. Stopping waste is the easiest way to improve water efficiency. Here are some examples of things you can do (or not do).

**Repair Leaks**-Leaks can account for as much as 20% of an average household's water use. Even the smallest drip can add up to a significant loss of water (and energy, if it is a hot water faucet that is dripping). A leaking toilet can waste up to 200 gallons per day. You can detect a toilet leak by adding a few drops

of food coloring to the water in the tank. If coloring shows up in the bowl, without flushing, a leak is present. You can usually repair leaking fixtures easily and inexpensively with kits available at the local hardware store.

**Don't Let the Water Run**-Rather than letting the faucet run for a minute to get a cool drink of water, just fill up a jug and keep it in the refrigerator. Fill the sink rather than letting the water run when you are preparing fresh vegetables and fruit, shaving, or washing. Buy a showerhead with a turn-off valve so you don't have to let the water run while you soap up.

**Don't Use the Toilet as a Trash Can**- You waste several gallons of water every time you flush to dispose of such things as tissues or spiders.

**Turn Off the Lights When You Leave A Room**-Almost eight of every ten gallons of water withdrawn in Ohio is used in the electricity generation process. So, conserving electricity also conserves water.

### Use Water Conserving Fixtures

**Toilets**-Toilets are the largest indoor water user in American homes, accounting for 27% of total water use in the average home. Toilets manufactured before 1980 use 5-7 gallons for each flush, but you can easily reduce that by 1 gallon per flush by filling a gallon jug with water and placing it in the tank (add some gravel to the jug to weigh it down). Don't use a brick, it could deteriorate and crack the tank! To obtain even larger reductions in water use, install one of the newer low-consumption toilets, designed to use less than 1.6 gallons at a time.

**Clothes Washers and Dishwashers**-Clothes washers and dishwashers account for about 20% of household water use: 40-50 gallons for each load of laundry and 7-14 gallons for each load of dishes. Consolidate loads as often as possible, or use the load size function that is included on most of the newer machines.

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When it's time to purchase a new appliance, make water efficiency a top consideration. High-efficiency clothes washers use an average of 27 gallons of water per load; water-efficient dishwashers use about 7 gallons per load.

**Showers and Bathtubs**-Bathing and showering account for the third largest home water use. Older showerheads pour out up to 8 gallons per minute; showerheads manufactured after 1994 use only 2.5 gallons per minute. Upgrading to a newer showerhead can substantially reduce water use as well as hot water bills. Keeping shower time under 5 minutes also conserves water and energy. Bathing is usually more water-efficient than showering, especially if you fill the tub just halfway (about 30 gallons). If you have small children, consider bathing them together, instead of one at a time.

**Sinks**-Inexpensive low-flow aerators save water in bathroom and kitchen sinks. A single indoor faucet without a low-flow aerator can pour out as much as 7 gallons per minute. Installing a low-flow faucet may save even more water; some use as little as 1.5 gallons per minute. Consider not using your in-sink garbage disposer, it's a big water guzzler.

**Lawns and Gardens**-Your family can practice water efficiency outdoors as well. During the hot summer months, frequent watering of lawns and gardens can more than double a normal household's

water usage. You'll conserve water by watering lawns and garden plants early in the day, before 10 a.m., to reduce evaporation and sun scalding. Lawns should be watered once a week with no more than 1" of water applied. Raising the height of cut on your lawn mower will significantly reduce the quantity of water needed to maintain a green lawn. The ODNR Division of Water's Fact Sheet, "Water Efficiency in Your Own Back Yard" offers detailed information and tips to help you conserve water when caring for your lawn and garden plants.

### **Additional Information**

If you're among the many Ohioans who depend upon private wells for their household water needs, consult the ODNR Division of Water's Fact Sheet, "Private Wells – Solutions to Common Problems".

For additional information on water efficiency and the conservation of Ohio's water resources, contact:

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