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ALABAMA A & M AND AUBURN UNIVERSITIES

## Conserving Water Why Conserve Water?

**A**labama has abundant water resources envied by people in less fortunate parts of the country. In those places, conservation by homeowners is often necessary, just to have enough water for basic needs. But why conserve here in water-rich Alabama?

### **Saving Money**

The simplest answer is that conserving water saves money, in many cases, very significant amounts of money. If you depend on your own well and septic system, the hundreds of gallons of water released each day will, over a period of years, saturate the soil near the septic system absorption field to the point where extensive repair or replacement is necessary. Replacing a septic system costs \$2,000 to \$4,000. Conserving water can extend the life of the system and delay the need for repair.

If you live in an area serviced by a municipal system, the greater your water use, the more you pay for water and sewer service. In some communities, costly sewage system expansion has been avoided by community-wide household water conservation.

### **Protecting The Environment**

In addition to saving money, water conservation can help protect the environment. Citizens and the government are becoming more sensitive to the negative impacts that developing new water supplies has on our environment. It is becoming increasingly difficult to create "new" water by damming wild rivers or diverting water from one natural drainage basin to another.

A more subtle environmental impact is the intrusion of saltwater into freshwater aquifers because of unwise water withdrawals. These areas are often close to metropolitan population centers where water is needed the most. Implementing water conservation programs could minimize or even prevent such environmental impacts and also delay the need for the creation of "new" water supplies.

### **Preventing Water Pollution**

Water conservation also helps tremendously in preventing water pollution. When old, leaky, or poor-

ly designed septic systems are overloaded, nutrient and bacterial contamination of nearby lakes and streams can occur. Even the drinking water from your own well can be contaminated. Overloading municipal sewer systems can also cause untreated sewage to flow to lakes and rivers. The smaller the amount of water flowing through these systems, the lower the likelihood of pollution.

Pollution costs money, too. Excessive weed growth in a lake caused by nutrient enrichment from leaky septic systems often means costly weed control measures paid for by you and your neighbors. Polluted home water wells cost thousands of dollars to fix if they can be repaired at all.

### **Preserving Water Resources**

Finally, water conservation will help preserve our water resources. Although liquid water is one of the most plentiful substances on earth, many scientists feel that a shortage of fresh water is likely to be one of the most severe long-term environmental problems facing our nation. A shortage of fresh water could occur for any number of reasons including rising water demands by agriculture, industry, and cities; a rapidly increasing population; pollution; flagrant waste; and unequal distribution.

Increased demands on water resources by agriculture, industry, cities, and individuals can lead to many problems including accelerated pollution. This water pollution can further limit the supply of available fresh water or significantly increase water treatment costs.

While most people would not think that they waste water, few individuals actually know how much water they use in a day. Studies show big differences in the amount of water used by rural and urban families. In one study, the range was from 66 to 118 gallons per person per day, with urban households using the larger amounts. Around home, the average American family uses about twice the daily water of Europeans, a good indication that we may be somewhat wasteful.

Unequal distribution of water resources can also cause water shortages. For example, droughts are not

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uncommon, even in the humid southeastern United States. According to the U.S. Weather Bureau, a drought exists whenever rainfall for a period of 21 days or longer is only 30 percent of the normal average for that particular time and place.

## Conclusion

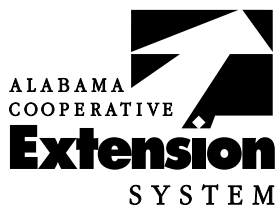
So why conserve water? Conserving water makes sense: it saves money and energy; it protects the environment and prevents pollution; and it preserves one of our most precious resources.

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