

Water shortage looms, new report warns

Waterloo Region ranked second for water conservation, but lags behind Europe

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WATERLOO REGION

Unless they learn to conserve, Canadians will face a water crisis on the same scale as the recent power blackout that left 50 million people in the dark, according to a report released this week by the University of Victoria.

The report rates Waterloo Region second best among 20 Canadian communities ranked for water conservation overall and seventh in terms of household use.

But don't take any bows just yet.

Oliver Brandes, a researcher who worked on the report, says being at the top of this list only means a community is the best of a bad lot. Canadians rate second only to the United States when it comes to wasting water.

An average Canadian consumes 1.9 million litres of water a year, almost five times as much as a person in Sweden where the average is 404,185 litres.

The average home in Waterloo Region uses 218 litres per person a day. That jumps to 359 litres per person a day when all other uses, such as industrial and commercial, are factored in. According to the report, Charlotte used the least amount of water on

the residential side with 156 litres a day per person. Whitehorse (519 litres) and St. John's (659 litres) used the most.

When it came to total use, Iqaluit ranked No. 1, with only 278 litres, followed by Waterloo with 359 litres.

Hamilton (921 litres) and Montreal (1,287 litres) were the highest.

While Waterloo Region fares well in the comparison, the report paints a grim picture for the future.

"Our urbanites are some of the most wasteful water users on the planet," says Brandes, whose study is called *Flushing the Future? Examining Urban Water Use in Canada*.

"The real message is this is a problem that needs to be addressed. Our cities are vulnerable and there are alternatives," Brandes said from Victoria.

"Waterloo is an example of a good program, but they can be doing more. What they are doing should be the norm, not the exception."

Brandes said the focus is almost always on how to get more water instead of using what we have better.

The difficulty he had getting reliable data for the study "indicates what a non-issue water conservation is for government," he said.

Steve Gombos agrees that more has to be done to conserve water. He manages the region's water conservation programs and spends a lot of his time these days co-ordinating patrols aimed at ensuring people don't water their lawns more than once a week.

Gombos says he can see problems down the road for Canadian communities.

"You have continued growth and continued consumption and eventually the systems in place can't keep up.

"I can see shortages being more common in the future."

"Canadians have enjoyed lots of fresh clean water, but we are sort of complacent, thinking we have lots. But we don't have as much as we think and it is decreasing as we grow."

Gombos figures Waterloo Region will reduce its per capita consumption rate in the future as more people turn to water-saving appliances.

"But continued use of water for lawns and gardens can blow away any savings you make inside," he said.

One in four Canadian municipalities with water systems reported shortages between 1994 and 1999.

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