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# the Ring

The University of Victoria's Community Newspaper

May 2004 · Vol 30 · No 5

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## Link infrastructure grants to water conservation, urges UVic research group

by Patty Pitts

Water-guzzling Canadian municipalities should make a commitment to water conservation before being eligible for federal infrastructure grants, say the researchers behind a new report on urban water management.

The Future in Every Drop: The Benefits, Barriers, and Practice of Urban Water Demand Management in Canada by UVic's POLIS project on ecological governance, recommends a fundamental shift in water usage in the country and calls for action by all levels of government to ensure a sustainable future for water.

"Governments must lead by example, demonstrate the importance of water conservation and the potential for innovative solutions, and help create a lasting 'water ethic' in its citizens," says Michael M'Gonigle, director of the POLIS project and eco-research professor of environmental law and policy. "A simple first step is for governments to link infrastructure grants to conservation-based water planning. In many cases, conservation is the next best and cheapest source of 'new' water for Canadian cities."

The POLIS team's previous two reports on water management examined and diagnosed Canada's ailing urban water management system. The Future in Every Drop provides the prescription—practical action plans to implement demand management. To promote the recommendations in the report, the POLIS urban water team has presented their research to Environment Canada and encouraged the federal government to consider the report as a blueprint for action.

M'Gonigle believes this dialogue is a good first step toward the federal government taking the lead on water conservation.

"As Prime Minister Paul Martin knows, sustainable cities are critical to the future of our nation and

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water is a key starting point." The POLIS team will continue to meet with other levels of government to further promote the key steps to incorporate demand management for urban water sustainability in Canada.

The latest report from the POLIS researchers emphasizes that the traditional supply-side approach to urban water management in Canada, which seeks new water sources and expands infrastructure, is increasingly expensive and environmentally unsustainable. The report provides a blueprint for federal, provincial/territorial and municipal governments to take action through demand management to protect the future of Canadian fresh water resources.

"Conservation and demand management can no longer be seen as an emergency response to drought," says Oliver Brandes, research associate and co-author of the report with Keith Ferguson. "Other industrialized countries have used demand management measures such as water-efficient fixtures, leak repair, public education and incentives to reduce water use, without affecting quality of life for end users. Simply put, using less water does not lower quality of life."

While provinces and territories are the primary regulators and administrators of freshwater use, regional and municipal authorities set prices, deliver the water and treat the resulting wastewater. M'Gonigle says federal and provincial governments can play a critical role in achieving long-term water sustainability through linking infrastructure grants to conservation, ensuring sufficient capacities for demand management exist at local levels, and making sure sufficient data and research exist to guide local decision-makers.

The Future in Every Drop report is available online at [www.waterdsm.org](http://www.waterdsm.org).