

Brown lawns hot

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Oak Bay News

Emerald is out. Gold is in.

Fields of gold have sprouted in the Capital Region after the recent heat wave, and regional water supply commission Nils Jensen applauds the golden-is-gorgeous approach to lawn care.

"Brown lawns are becoming a status symbol," he said. "Letting your grass go golden yellow started in the drought year of 2001. Many people have continued the habit of not watering their lawn."

And, he noted, the dried-out-lawn is becoming an accepted practice.

"The year 2001 was a wakeup call for all of us and a reminder that all of our resources are precious as water is."

In addition to conserving water, residents conserve time.

"I don't have to mow my lawn," Jensen said.

Stage 1 water conservation bylaws are now in effect, which means residents with even-numbered addresses are permitted to water their lawns Wednes-

days and Saturdays from 4 to 10 a.m. and 7 to 10 p.m. Residents with odd-numbered addresses can water Thursdays and Sundays in the same time slots.

Capital Regional District bylaw enforcement officers slap a \$75 fine on residents caught not following bylaw regulations.

Stage 1 restrictions aim to reduce water use by 10 per cent.

"The bylaws are aimed at not restricting people's water use, but conserving our water supply," Jensen said.

Water levels at the Capital Region's reservoirs are currently at 89 per cent capacity.

While those levels are high, Jensen said residents should still think about conserving water during summer months.

"By conserving water we extend the life of our reservoir," he said.

The CRD expanded the main reservoir in 2003 to keep pace with demand. That project cost more than \$20 million.

Capital Region residents use 45 million gallons of water a day. Homeowners flush 40 per cent of the water down the toilet.

"The next source of water could cost \$150 million to \$200 million – and that's a conservative estimate," Jensen said.

Wasting water costs money and exerts pressure on the environment.

As a senior research associate for the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, Oliver Brandes studies the structure and dynamics of urban water use.

"Population growth, increasing development and the uncertainties of climate change are compounding these threats to water security in this country, including threats to the aquatic ecosystems that sustain us," he said.

Moreover, Canadians are water hogs compared to Europe. On average, Canadians consume twice as much water as Europeans.

"Even as a relatively water-rich country, the freshwater supplies in Canada have limits – and communities across the country are beginning to reach those limits," he said. "Drinking water supplies are at

risk, economic opportunities are threatened and aquatic ecosystem health and fisheries are declining."

Traditional approaches to water management are outdated, Brandes said.

Constantly seeking new supplies of fresh water instead of trying to control demand is simply unsustainable.

"Unless Canada changes its approach to water management, we are headed toward a water crisis of our own

making," he said.

However, Brandes' hope for a water-wise future community has not dried up.

"We need to focus on a more holistic approach to how we manage our most precious resource – one that embraces innovation, new technologies and approaches to provide water in a more sustainable way," he said.

Dual flush toilets, rainwater harvesting systems and reusing and recycling household or neighbourhood water are some examples.

Residents also have to reprogram how they view water.

"It all starts with a new vision, and a new relationship to water. We need to instill a 'water ethic' where we take sustainability seriously," Brandes said.

Furthermore, politicians and decision-makers must take the leading role in the process, he added.

"Simple things like regulations that promote reuse and recycling technologies, financial incentives that ensure developers build with cutting edge water efficiency technologies, prices that not only match the value of this resource, but also provide signals to promote conservation, for example paying by volume used for both water and waste water – not just flat rates that promote over-consumption."

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BRANDES
researcher...

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