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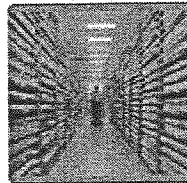
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14/3/03

Transcript:

Introduction: Delegates from all over the world are heading to Kyoto, Japan this weekend. They'll be attending the third World Water Forum. Oliver Brandes of the University of Victoria is going. He's a researcher looking into Canada's use of water. On Commentary he says Canadians waste most of their treated water.

Oliver Brandes:

Water, water everywhere, and all of it fit to drink. That's the problem. We're using too much treated water. Canadians, like Americans, are global leaders in water consumption. We're a nation of water abusers and misusers.

And now we're running into problems: shortages in some communities, hundreds of boil-water orders across the country and soaring costs as we try to build bigger and better water systems.

Historically, we've concentrated on increasing the supply - more dams, more pipes, more water treatment plants. We've hardly thought of conserving water - managing the demand instead of increasing the supply.

Imagine if we took the water we did our dishes in or showered with, removed the soap and scum and reused it to flush our toilets, water our lawns or irrigate our fields. Reduced, recycled and reused. Why not? Now imagine this not only in your house, but in your

neighbour's house, and every house across Canada. We could call it a blue revolution.

All our city water is treated to drinking water standards, whether we flush it down the toilet, wash our cars with it, irrigate our lawns, or drink it. This is the same clean water that much of the world covets. The lack of it leads to literally thousands of deaths worldwide every day.

The average residential city dweller uses 590-litres per day. That's 2,360 coffee cups of water - more than double the European average. And all of this is treated to drinking water standards.

And what do we do with it. At least half of it is flushed down the toilet or sprayed on our lawns. How long can we afford this expensive waste?

In the wake of Walkerton, everyone has focused on water quality, but quality and quantity are linked. Excessive water use limits the ability to provide basic water quality, but so does treating large quantities of water to high standards. It unnecessarily increases the costs of providing clean water for the most important uses: drinking, bathing and food preparation, where quality really counts.

In Canada we haven't addressed this issue. Where is the push for water recycling, the regulations to ensure water efficiency, the household conservation systems?

Being water-wise means understanding the potential of demand management. We need people with diverse skills and expertise right across the country to animate a national debate and create a shared vision.

Think of it as a Canadian "pre-emptive" strike on the looming global battle against water scarcity.

For Commentary, I'm Oliver Brandes in Victoria.

Listen to today's Commentary