

Have Your Say: How can we each conserve more water this summer?

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Craig and Marc Kielburger founded Free The Children and Me to We. Their biweekly Brain Storm column taps experts and readers for solutions to social issues.

North Americans used to think of drought as a problem that only happens on far away continents. But as California enters its fourth summer of historic water shortage, Canadians need to reconsider our sense of immunity.

Despite improving habits, Canada remains among the largest per capita water users in the world – nine times higher than Denmark and double the average of developed countries, according to a Conference Board of Canada [report](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/press/newsrelease/13-01-17/high_consumption_and_throwaway_habits_make_canada_an_environmental_laggard.aspx) [http://www.conferenceboard.ca/press/newsrelease/13-01-17/high_consumption_and_throwaway_habits_make_canada_an_environmental_laggard.aspx].

A watershed management professor at the University of British Columbia [recently warned](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/california-drought-crisis-could-come-to-b-c-says-ubc-professor-1.3006242) [http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/california-drought-crisis-could-come-to-b-c-says-ubc-professor-1.3006242] that our complacency about water use could quickly lead to a similar crisis to the one that has taken California by surprise. Drought means higher food prices, loss of hydroelectric power supply and more wild fires, among other dangerous side effects.

If “blue gold” becomes the instigator of the wars of the future, as prominent Canadian environmental experts have argued, we need to start treating water as the invaluable resource that it is.

After all, without water, what would Canadians paddle, swim and fish in all summer?

Oliver Brandes, co-director of the University of Victoria’s POLIS project on water sustainability, suggests rain is the simple answer to our complex water woes. “Rainwater can flush our toilets, wash our clothes and be heated for our showers, if we harvest it from our rooftops and store it in cisterns allowing it to be used, and reused, in all our homes, buildings and neighbourhoods,” he says.

While we’re waiting for smarter architecture and home plumbing systems, we can each save water

beyond the conventional ideas of turning off the tap when we brush our teeth.

This week's question: What are your best creative strategies for conserving water over the summer?

THE EXPERTS:

“My small trick to conserve water is to shower efficiently, stopping the water to apply soap and shampoo before rinsing. Another is to garden using succulent plants that require little irrigation, such as cacti, agave and aloe – even in place of grass, which consumes way too much water.” – *Aziza Chaouni, professor of architecture and landscape and design, University of Toronto*

“See how much water is on your dinner plate. From farm to fork, water is used in every step of the process to grow, process, package and transport foods. Choose smaller cuts of meat for your barbecue, and prioritize local, fresh produce over processed foods.” – *Bernadette Conant, executive director, Canadian Water Network* [<http://www.cwn-rce.ca/>], Waterloo, Ont.

“Make everyone more mindful by raising the price of water. [Governments could] create surcharges for water use during summer months and an additional surcharge for water use during peak periods on summer days.” – *Steven Renzetti, professor of water economics, Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont.*

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