

Water Conservation—Do We Need It?

In recent years, we've been asked to conserve energy, conserve gas, and conserve our natural resources by recycling. Why would we also need to conserve water when we live in one of the most water abundant areas of the world? The answer--because we are rapidly depleting our groundwater supplies.

Most of Wisconsin uses groundwater for their drinking water supply. It is clean, abundant and in most parts of the state—easy to access. With the exception of small areas in the easternmost parts of the county, Waukesha County's water also comes from groundwater. But in the southeastern part of the state, we are in what is called the "cone of depression". This is an area where the water supplies are being pumped more rapidly than they can be replenished, resulting in aquifer levels that are continuing to drop.

Everyone can help with this problem by conserving water, especially outdoor water use in the summer. Is there really that much water being used outdoors? Let's look at the numbers. In 2006, the City of Waukesha pumped 190,328,000 gallons of water in February compared with 252,220,000 in July. The additional water used in July was enough to fill almost 62 Olympic sized pools! During hot dry weather, the City of Waukesha pumped 10,229,000 gallons on a single day in July! And it's not only Waukesha. The City of Pewaukee pumped 27,882,093 gallons of water in February compared with 55,286,273 gallons in July. The same kind of comparisons are found in every municipality.

One of the best ways to help is to let your lawn go dormant in hot, dry weather. The grass will turn dry and brown, but it is only dormant—not dead. It will green again in cooler, wetter weather. If you feel you must water your lawn, you should water only once per week in the morning, giving the equivalent of 1 inch of rain. Sprinkling in the afternoon results in a lot of water loss through evaporation. Be sure to check with your municipality about watering ordinances.

Another way to help includes planting native plants in your planting beds. Native plants have very deep roots and are very drought resistant needing little water. Consider installing a rain barrel to capture roof water that would otherwise become runoff. The water can then be used during dry times for washing cars and watering. Wash your car on the lawn instead of the driveway. This keeps runoff from polluting our lakes and streams and waters your lawn at the same time! There are many ways to conserve water if we set our minds to it. We simply have to realize that our water resources are limited and in need of our help.