

NORTH ISLAND LABORATORIES E-NEWSLETTER

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Feature Article:

By J. Haddock

Summer is here and many of us are spending more time in our gardens and, hopefully enjoying the “fruits” (and vegetables ☺!) of our springtime labor. The hot, dry weather reminds us of the need to conserve water. Local municipalities are imposing limits on water usage and individuals need to become more aware of ways to reduce household needs for water.

Most of Canada’s water supply comes from nearby lakes, rivers and groundwater supplies. Water seems to be so abundant here in Canada, and certainly we are blessed with many lakes, rivers and streams and mountain reservoirs. Nonetheless regional drought and water shortages are the norm even in a water-rich province such as British Columbia. Part of the explanation for this lies in the fact that surface and groundwater resources only make up approximately 2.5 % of the water resources on the planet, and are therefore a limited supply.

Did you know that Canada has ranked a dismal 28th out of 29 countries observed for water consumption? (O.E.C.D. - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). (<http://www.environmentalindicators.com/htdocs/indicators/6wate.htm>) Over-consumption of water creates unnecessary stresses on our natural supplies and increases storm runoff and subsequent pollution issues in towns and cities.

A few tips to reduce water consumption:

- Hand water gardens in the evenings or early morning and mulch to minimize loss via evaporation – check your local regulations regarding appropriate watering times.
- Update older faucets, showerheads, washing machines, and toilets with newer, water efficient models.
- Try to be aware of unnecessary water use, for example while brushing your teeth or washing the dishes.
- Rain barrels can be used to collect water for garden use – cover with fine mesh to avoid mosquito reproduction.
- Try to be aware!

Did You Know...

A category of bacteria called “Non-Coliform” or “Background” Bacteria, commonly found in wells, is causing some confusion to well owners as to exactly what health risks they represent. Background bacteria are commonly associated with Total and Fecal Coliforms and tend to grow under similar conditions. A concern can arise that the Total Coliform count is being masked if Non-coliform background bacteria are present in high numbers. Any presence of bacteria in a well should be investigated, especially if the bacterial count is over the Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines. Disinfection of the well system and further investigation of structural integrity and potential contamination sources should be performed. Common entry points of contamination for Coliform and Background Bacteria are:

- Wells that are left open, or have poorly constructed or weathered and/or disintegrating caps.
- For dug wells, the cement rings can begin to degrade and small holes can form, allowing access for tiny animals and/or insects (mice, snakes, slugs etc.). In addition, general degradation around the edges of a dug well can create a “funnel” effect, allowing surface water to enter the well system.
- Back-flow from garden hoses can occasionally introduce small amounts of bacterial contamination.
- Any repairs and maintenance performed on the well should be followed by disinfection.

Further Information:

See our web site: <http://www.nilabs.com>

<http://atlas.gc.ca/site/english/maps/freshwater/consumption>

<http://www.ec.gc.ca/envhome.html>

http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/policy/prov/e_prov.htm#BC