

It's Time We Get Serious About Water Conservation

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I've been waiting until we had some wet weather to write this column. I wanted to wait until we'd had some really wet weather so when I started talking about water conservation you'd all think I'd gone off my rocker! As a city, a state and a country, we generally treat water like trash. We treat water like it's a disposable product instead of THE most important natural resource that we have!

All too often we take water for granted because we go to the fountain or a water faucet, turn on the water and we have plenty of fresh water that we never doubt for a minute is safe to drink. This is a luxury that much of the world doesn't have. Abundant water is taken for granted, yet even in parts of our state, not that far from here, homeowners and residents have been having to tighten their water belt!

We waste water daily. We waste a LOT of water daily! Take this week for example. Between the storms on Monday and Thursday morning I had almost 4 inches of rain. A lot of that came down quite nicely allowing for good infiltration into the soil profile. Since the first of June we've had 7.5 inches of rain in Junction City. The top couple feet of soil is pretty darn wet right now. Yet on Thursday morning, mere hours after we had over an inch of rain, I saw numerous lawn sprinkler systems running. WHY?!?!?? At this time there is absolutely no need to be watering your lawn for the next two weeks. Shut off the sprinkler systems!

I get so furious when I see people with a garden hose and a nozzle spraying down flower beds, trees, shrubs, even lawns. There is absolutely no way that this is doing any good. If you really do need to water landscape plants, use a slow running open hose or a drip hose. Another one that sets me off is people hosing off the driveway or sidewalk after they've mowed the lawn. Your driveway doesn't need a shower, use a broom!

We waste as much water inside the house as we do outside. In new construction or when any water using household item needs to be replaced, opt for a water saving model. A few years ago, when it came time to replace our 20 year old washing machine, we bought one of the newer front load washing machines. For just the two of us I didn't figure we did enough laundry to make a difference. It knocked nearly 200 cubic feet per month off our water bill, though. For reference, a cubic foot of water is roughly 7.5 gallons. New toilets use less water. Low flow shower heads can cut your water use in an average shower down to just a few gallons.

It's hard to realize, and harder still to accept that this country is heading towards the same water shortage as the rest of the world. As the population continues to grow, the availability of clean, usable water continues to shrink. The real unknown is what impact climate change will have.

While looking for new water resources is important, as is protecting the quality of existing water resources, the forgotten technique of having a longer supply of water is simply not using as much. We have two choices when it comes to water conservation. We can start now conserving our water resources voluntarily. Or we can wait until we reach crisis mode and we use rising prices to ration it economically. I prefer something that I'm in control of. So let's start taking a little time each day to try use a little less water at home, and at work!