

Clean Water for a Healthy World

by Commissioner Trudy Rolla



Most of us take for granted a clean, safe and abundant water supply and the wastewater treatment system. For many people around the world, getting water, making it drinkable, and disposing of it takes about a quarter to half of their day and affects their health and work. The United Nations reports that: “2.6 billion people - 280 million of them children under five - live

without improved sanitation, and each year more than 1.5 million children die from diarrhea caused by infectious waterborne diseases. It is a crisis of local challenges with global repercussions. More people die as a result of polluted water than are killed by all forms of violence, including wars. Over half of the world’s hospital beds are occupied with people suffering from illnesses linked with contaminated water...”

People’s health, livelihoods, their future, and the planet’s ecosystems all depend on safe water - yet every year, the world’s waterways takes in the weight of 6.8 billion people in the form of pollution. Two million tons of sewage and industrial and agricultural waste are poured into the world’s waters daily. In addition, industry dumps 300-400 million tons of heavy metals, solvents, toxic sludge, and other wastes into water annually. New contaminants, such as discarded pharmaceuticals, also threaten water quality and the ecosystem.

This affects us locally because with the globalization of consumer goods and food, we all depend on other countries to produce affordable items for daily life. A UN expert on this topic, Steve Lonergan¹, says “Problems of water scarcity and water pollution affect human and ecosystem health, and hinder economic and agricultural development. Local and regional problems, in turn, may affect the rest of the world by threatening food supplies and global economic development. The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development concludes that these problems could result in a series of local and regional water crises, with serious global implications.”

What could be done?

UN reports in *Clearing the Waters: A Focus on Water Quality Solutions*, that investment of \$20 million in low-cost water technologies, such as drip irrigation and foot-operated pumps, could lift 100 million farming families out of extreme poverty. Repairing water and sewage networks can reduce pollution and generate employment. In some developing countries, 50-60% of treated water is lost to leaks. By some estimates, saving just half of this amount would supply water to 90 million people without further investment.

But while there are solutions, much more needs to be done. World Water Day 2010 includes initiatives around the globe to raise awareness and emphasize the key importance of good water quality in improving human well-being. The event is a call for action on pollution prevention, clean-up, and restoration of waterways in order to sustain healthy ecosystems and improve human health.

Here’s what you can do:

- Volunteer at local water quality projects. King County has a list at: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/stewardship/volunteer.aspx>.
- Donate to non-profit agencies that support safe drinking water initiatives (you can request a list by email from NUD at <http://www.nud.net/contactUs.aspx>).
- More ideas are in the UN publication: *How to Protect Water Quality - You Can Make a Difference*, <http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday/campaign.html>.
- For more information on participating in World Water Day 2010 and the challenges to the world’s water quality, visit: www.worldwaterday2010.info.

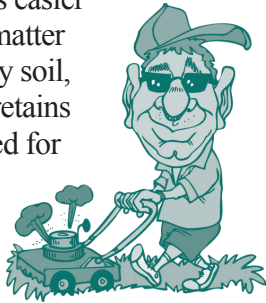
¹Steve Lonergan, Director of the Division of Early Warning and Assessment at United Nations Environment Programme UNEP. Accessed from <http://www.unep.org/OurPlanet/imgversn/154/lonergan.html> on April 8, 2010.

Preparing Your Landscape for Summer

Prepare your landscaping now for summer and you will be rewarded with lower water bills and a healthier landscape.

Healthy Topsoil for Your Lawn

Consider improving your topsoil. Plant roots reach air, water, and nutrients easier in healthy topsoil. Organic matter will help to loosen heavy clay soil, adds slow release nutrients, retains moisture and reduces the need for watering. The easiest way to renew organic material is to leave grass clippings and leaves in your lawn.



Without organic matter and soil organisms to maintain texture, in time the soil becomes compacted and its nutrients are used up. Water no longer goes down into the soil, but runs along the surface or collects in puddles. Below are some tips for checking your soil.

- ◆ Is there less than six inches of topsoil? If so, then consider applying a “topdressing.” To do this, spread a half inch layer of soil with up to 20% organic matter.
- ◆ Thatch is a dense layer of dead grass that hinders water absorption. If the thatch layer is over 1/2 inch thick, remove it in spring or fall, when it is fairly dry.
- ◆ If the soil is compacted, aeration can help. Aeration is the removal of soil

cores from the lawn.

Remember, most lawns need only one inch of water a week, including rainfall, to stay healthy during even the hottest summer weather. When needed, fertilize with a slow release fertilizer in late winter or early spring to build a good root system. Do not fertilize in the hot summer months.

Mulch for Your Trees, Flowers and Shrubs

We can easily put nature’s recycling system to work in our gardens by spreading compost around trees, shrubs and other plants. This is called “mulching.” Mulching keeps soil loose and moist, smothers weeds, prevents soil erosion, and releases nutrients as the material breaks down.

To apply mulch material, start a few inches away from the plant’s stem and continue

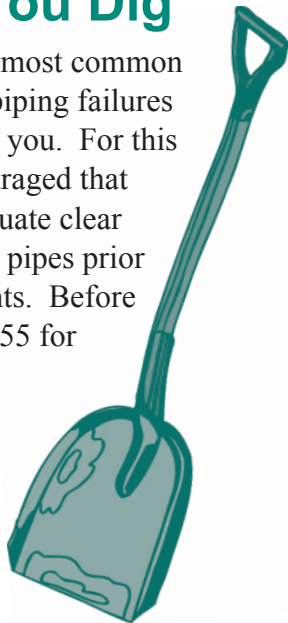


to a point beyond its outermost leaves and branches. Spread one or two inches of compost around annual flowers and vegetables, and up to six inches around trees and shrubs.

A well-prepared planting bed requires less water and little or no chemical fertilizers. For more information on healthy soil, plant selection, smart watering, and much more, visit www.savingwater.org. ◆

Call Before You Dig

Tree roots are one of the most common causes of sewer service piping failures and can be very costly to you. For this reason, it is highly encouraged that customers maintain adequate clear zones around their sewer pipes prior to planting trees and plants. Before planting, call 800.424.5555 for utility locates or call the District’s Operations Department to get a copy of the record drawing of your sewer system at 425.398.4403. Plant Smart! ◆



Utility Easements

The District has guidelines governing what can be placed within a water or sewer utility easement. There have been instances of prohibited structures built within these easements and they had to be removed, at the property owners expense, in order to avoid or repair damages to the utility lines.

Please call the District to see if there is a recorded easement on your property. Generally, no fences, walls, rockeries, structures or deep-rooted plants may be placed in an easement. Such structures and obstructions can damage, prevent or delay access to the District’s utility lines, jeopardizing public health and safety. ◆

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