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Information

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WATER FACTS AND FIGURES

DID YOU KNOW...

- ❑ Water supplies are falling while the demand is dramatically growing at an unsustainable rate. Over the next 20 years, the average supply of water worldwide per person is expected to drop by a third.
- ❑ By the middle of this century, seven billion people in 60 countries may be faced with water scarcity (at least 2 billion in 48 countries will face such a harsh reality).
- ❑ One litre of wastewater pollutes about eight litres of freshwater. An estimated 12,000 km³ of polluted water worldwide, which is more than the total amount contained in the world's ten largest river basins at any given moment. Therefore, if pollution keeps pace with population growth, the world will effectively lose 18,000 km³ of freshwater by 2050 – almost nine times the total amount countries currently use each year for irrigation, which is by far the largest consumer of the resource.
- ❑ Asian rivers are the most polluted in the world, with three times as many bacteria from human waste as the global average. These rivers have 20 times more lead than those of industrialized countries.
- ❑ Water consumption has almost doubled in the last 50 years. A child born in the developed world consumes 30 to 50 times the water resources of one in the developing world.
- ❑ People already use over half the world's accessible freshwater, and may use nearly three-quarters by 2025.
- ❑ Over 1.5 billion people lack ready access to drinking water and, if current consumption patterns continue, at least 3.5 billion people — nearly half the world's projected population — will live in water-stressed river basins in just 20 years.
- ❑ Two-fifths of fish species come from freshwater habitats. There is one species to 15 km³ of freshwater, as compared to one species to 100,000 km³ of seawater.
- ❑ Humans are already appropriating more than half of all accessible surface water runoff, and this may increase to 70% by 2025. The three largest water users in global terms are:
 - Agriculture, 67%;
 - Industry, 19%, and
 - Municipal / residential, 9%.
- ❑ Water is becoming scarce due to higher pollution levels and habitat degradation. Contamination denies as many as 3.3 billion people access to clean water supplies. In developing countries, an estimated 90% of wastewater is discharged directly into rivers and streams without treatment. Each year there are about 250 million cases of water-related diseases, with roughly 5 to 10 million deaths.
- ❑ Producing a fast food lunch--hamburger, french fries, and a soft drink--uses 1500 gallons of water. This includes the water needed to raise the potatoes, the grain for the bun and the grain needed to feed the cattle, and the production of the soda.
- ❑ At least 1 in 3 Asians has no access to safe drinking water, and at least 1 in 2 has no access to sanitation.
- ❑ Freshwater fish stocks have declined by up to 90 per cent in many of the world's largest rivers.



- ❑ The freshwater fisheries of the Mekong River and tributaries are estimated to have a market value of nearly US\$1 billion per year. The 73 million people living on and around the Mekong River depend on fish and other resources in the river system for most of the protein in their diets.
- ❑ WWF's Living Planet Index indicates that the world has already lost over half its freshwater biodiversity since 1970, more than for forests and marine habitats. Despite this, freshwater ecosystems continue to disappear or be altered at an alarming rate. Threats to these ecosystems include:
 - Conversion of wetlands to other uses. Many countries are under pressure to develop floodplains and other wetlands for agriculture or industry.
 - Large infrastructure projects such as dams and canals which alter riverflows, destroying populations of species like fish and floodplain forest trees..
 - Misuse and overexploitation of water resources, resulting in depletion of aquifers and falling water tables. Many rivers are being sucked dry, including China's Yellow River.
 - Introduction of non-native species which can choke waterways and become health hazards by providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes.
 - Indiscriminate sewage and industrial discharge. Asia's rivers average 20 times more lead than rivers in the industrialized world. and average 50 times more bacteria from human feces than the World Health Organization guidelines allow.

SOME INTERESTING NUMBERS:

- ❑ 1.1 billion -- the number of people worldwide who lack an adequate and safe supply of water for their daily needs, approximately one in five
- ❑ 5 million --- the number of people, mostly children, who die each year from illnesses caused by poor-quality water supplies
- ❑ 5 -- the minimum number of gallons (about 19 litres) of water needed to meet a person's daily needs, according to the World Health Organization
- ❑ 2.2 million – the number of people who die each year from diseases related to contaminated drinking water and poor sanitation.
- ❑ 50 -- the percentage of people in Africa who suffer from water-related diseases such as cholera and infant diarrhea
- ❑ 20 -- the percentage of the world's freshwater supply that is in Canada, which recently banned bulk exports of water
- ❑ \$90 billion -- estimated annual global investments in public water supplies
- ❑ \$4 billion -- estimated annual sales of the U.S. bottled water industry
- ❑ 2 -- the number of people who stripped naked during the opening ceremonies of the 2nd World Water Forum, to protest the construction of a dam in Spain

For further information:

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SOURCES:

UN World Water Development Report - *Water for People, Water for Life* (2003)

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