

# Report urges consumers to conserve water

## Simple actions as vital as sound policy, authors say

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**Waukesha** - Concern over the conservation of underground drinking water led environmental advocates this week to release a report that says the simple replacement of water-guzzling toilets can be just as important to preserving the dwindling resource as implementing sound policies on land and water use.

Jodi Habush Sinykin, a report co-author who is with Midwest Environmental Advocates, said it's hard for most to comprehend that some areas in this water-rich state have severe problems with dwindling and tainted sources of underground water, including Waukesha and Brown counties.

Yet, water wars exist throughout southeast Wisconsin over the rising demand for clean groundwater, pitting municipalities, landowners and lake associations against one another, landing many of their complex disputes in court.

The report calls itself a "tool kit" that offers solutions to water utilities, state legislators and water consumers on the use and preservation of what it said is a commodity for economic development and a natural resource that sustains life.

The report was presented before a number of prominent environmental activists at the Lee S. Dreyfus State Office Building.

Sinykin will present the report Dec. 2 to the Groundwater Advisory Committee, a group of water-use and policy experts brought together by the state Legislature to make recommendations on future groundwater management needs in Wisconsin.

The report stressed that water consumers should do what they can to economize personal water use.

It encourages water utilities to work in partnership with customers by offering discounts on plumbing fixtures that conserve water use, such as low-flow toilets and shower heads.

In order, the biggest users of water in a home are toilets, washing machines, faucets, showers and leaks, the report says.

### **Actions recommended**

Using Waukesha as an example, the report encourages utilities in water trouble to:

- Revise zoning and planning ordinances to require that new development have minimal impact on areas that recharge water aquifers.
- Readjust water rates so they increase in cost, instead of decrease, as more water is used.
- Recycle treated wastewater for public use, instead of just dumping it into a tributary.
- Restrict lawn and garden watering.
- Audit industrial users and implement water conservation plans.
- Have a water-leak detection program.

Waukesha Water Utility Manager Dan Duchniak said his agency has some of the suggestions already in place and is working on a number of others, including changing the rate structure for water use.

Duchniak this year announced a conservation initiative that would reduce water consumption by 20% in the next 15 years.

The Waukesha Water Utility is proposing to buy Lake Michigan water as a way of curing its water woes.

Conservationists, including those who presented the report, argue that Waukesha must sustain itself on water resources it now has available.

### **Indifference feared**

Despite the myriad ideas contained in the report, its authors and supporters fear the research will escape the notice of an indifferent public and policy-makers.

"It's a complicated issue," said Steve Schmuki, president of the Waukesha Environmental Action League. "It goes beyond all political boundaries we've set up. It's not something you can pinpoint and say, 'Here's the black-and-white answer.' "

Although the issue is on the front burner of several governing agencies, water utilities and research groups, water conservation must catch public attention, Sinykin said.

"My opinion is that it's still in the process of climbing up the ladder of public awareness," Schmuki said.

"There are discussions going on about a public water forum and about what politicians and government officials should be brought into the issue, such as the (Milwaukee and Waukesha) county executives. Even though they don't have direct control over supply issues, they have bully pulpits in which they can inform the public."