

WOMEN BEAR THE WEIGHT OF WATER

In the developed world, humans do not have to carry the water we use on a daily basis. If we did, it's safe to assume we'd use a lot less than we do. The **average American individual uses 100 to 176 gallons of water at home each day**. The weight of that water is about 836 to 1400 pounds. Imagine if your family had to work together every day to transport over 800 pounds of water into your home!

For people living in many third world countries, distance from a clean water source is a critical factor. In particular, it affects the lives of women. Collecting water in third world countries is rarely a family activity. It is a task largely designated to women and young girls. **Because women are also responsible for the care of young infants and children, girls begin carrying a small version of a water jug as early as 2 years old.**

In some places in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, **women can spend between 15 and 17 hours each week collecting water**. In times of drought, it can sometimes take even longer. Adequate water supply and good health are tightly linked, and the need to carry water long distances limits the amount women can bring to their families.

The dangers are not over even once water has been brought back home to the family. **Water is often contaminated with microorganisms that cause diarrhea, typhoid, and cholera**. These diseases are responsible for **approximately 80 percent of all illnesses and deaths in the developing world**, many of them children. In fact, **one child dies every eight seconds from a waterborne disease; approximately 15 million children a year.**

Women and female children who have to travel to collect water pay a high cost. **Less time is available for caring for children, preparing food, or pursuing income-generating activities**. In some regions women and girls must travel through unsafe areas and are vulnerable to attack. Families, in many cases, must forego sending their daughters to school, perpetuating the vicious cycle of illiteracy and poverty.

Sources: (<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/water>)
(<http://news.nationalgeographic.com>)

WATER-AWARE FACT SHEET

In many regions of the world, fresh water, both groundwater and surface water, **is being used faster than it can be replaced**. Already about one-third of the world's population lives in countries suffering from moderate-to-high water stress, according to the most recent Global Environment Outlook (GEO-3) report. Water stress is defined as areas where water consumption is more than 10% of renewable freshwater resources. The GEO-3 scientists project that **more than half the people in the world could be living in severely water-stressed areas by 2032**.

A lack of safe drinking water brings an added burden of illness to families already living in poverty. **Infectious waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, typhoid, and cholera are responsible for 80% of illnesses and deaths in the developing world**, many of them children. Worldwide, approximately 15 million children a year die from a waterborne disease or related illness.

The amount of water a person needs can vary; obviously, a person doing manual labor in the tropics will need more water than someone sitting at a computer in a temperate zone. **The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests 0.5 to 1 gallon a day for drinking, and another 1 gallon for cooking and food preparation as the bare minimum for survival**. However, the minimum quantity of water recommended by the U.S. Agency for International Development for household and urban use is close to **26.4 gallons per person per day**.

Some two million tons of waste per day are disposed of in open freshwater sources, including industrial wastes, agricultural wastes, human waste and chemicals. World Watch Institute, for example, estimates that **every minute, 300,000 gallons of raw sewage are dumped into the Ganges River, the primary source of water for many Indians**.

In all of Asia, only about 35 percent of the wastewater is treated, and about 14 percent is treated in Latin America. **A minimal percentage of treatment has been reported to be treated in Africa**. Even in industrialized countries, sewage is not universally treated, according to UNEP (United Nations Environment Program).

Freshwater resources are being further squandered due to pollution and the way in which we use water. **Agriculture accounts for an unbelievable 80% of world water consumption**, and an **estimated 60% of the water used for irrigation is wasted**, lost to leaky canals, evaporation, and mismanagement. Fertilizer and pesticide residues from farming also contribute to contamination of fresh water resources. Large cities waste their share of water too due to leaky systems.

Conserving and managing freshwater resources is politically and socially difficult; many rivers, lakes, and underground aquifers cross national boundaries and are often be shared by several countries, all with differing laws and beliefs about rights to use and ownership.

"This crisis is one of water governance, essentially caused by the ways in which we mismanage water," conclude the authors of the UN's World Water Development Report issued in March of 2007. According to Brian Morris, principal hydro-geologist at the British Geological Survey, "What is needed is pragmatic management such as **increasing public and government awareness**, properly resourcing the agencies that manage groundwater, supporting community management, and encouraging the use of incentives and disincentives particularly in poorer countries and rural areas. **It is vital we give groundwater value like any other scarce resource**".

Source: UN Highlights World Water Crisis (2007): (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com>)