

Conservation

Conservation is important, even in the land of 10,000 lakes.

Despite our seeming abundance of water, conservation is still essential in Minnesota. For example, it is anticipated that in parts of the metropolitan area groundwater levels are dropping much faster than the water can be replenished. In addition, some agricultural regions in Minnesota are especially vulnerable to drought which can affect crop yields and municipal supplies. It's important we use our water wisely. Below are some tips to help you and your family conserve.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website has great tips about how you can conserve, and save money in the process! Visit it here: <http://www.epa.gov/WaterSense/pubs/fixleak.html>

Some examples of easy things you can do to help conserve water:

- Fix running toilets—they can waste around 200 gallons a day or more.
- Turn the faucet off while brushing your teeth.
- Shower instead of bathe. Taking a bath uses (on average) more water than showering.
- Only run full loads of laundry, and set the washing machine to the correct water level.
- Only run a dishwasher when it's full.
- Use water-efficient appliances (look for the WaterSense label).

Cross Connection Control

Do your part to help prevent the problems caused by backflow and cross connections.

Backflow, or backsiphonage, occurs when the pressure of a polluted source exceeds that of the drinking water supply, which can pull contaminants back into the drinking water supply. It can result in contaminants, including hazardous chemicals and bacteria, mixing with drinking water. Cross connections—an actual or potential connection between a drinking water and non-drinking water supply—are sources of backflow problems.

Residential and commercial property owners should be concerned and diligent about backflow and cross connections. A garden hose can often be a cross connection. Someone spraying an herbicide with a cross connection could have some of the herbicide pulled back into the home plumbing, especially if there is a drop in the water pressure while the garden hose with the herbicide is attached.

The Minnesota Department of Health and American Water Works Association recommend the following precautions:

- Do not submerge hoses in buckets, pools, tubs, or sinks.
- Keep the end of the hose clear of possible contaminants.
- Do not use spray attachments without a backflow prevention device, and attach these devices to threaded faucets. Such devices are inexpensive and available at hardware stores.
- If a plumber is used to install backflow prevention devices, make sure the plumber is licensed to ensure that local codes and manufacturer's recommendations are met.

- Commercial property owners should develop a cross connection plan to minimize the risk of drawing contaminants into uncontaminated areas.
- Maintain air gaps (vertical separations between an outlet and the flood-level rim of a vessel of at least twice the diameter of the water supply outlet, and at least one inch) between hose outlets and any liquids.

Thanks for doing your part!

The Pros and Cons of Home Water Softening

Water softeners are a common water treatment device in many homes. They are effective for removing water hardness (dissolved calcium and magnesium) in water. The benefits of soft water include an increased efficiency for soaps and detergents, a reduction in mineral staining on fixtures and in pipes, and a potential increase in the lifespan of water heaters. Like all water system components, water softeners must be installed and maintained properly in order to operate safely and effectively.

Softened water can contain elevated sodium levels, so people on low-sodium diets should consult a physician if they plan on regularly consuming softened water.

Water softeners have operation and maintenance costs, and many produce salt brine as a byproduct. Minimizing the amount of salt brine used can help minimize downstream affects at wastewater treatment plants and the ecosystem. Some softeners also use a salt-free system.

When considering whether or not to use a water softener, contact your public water system to find out if the water is considered hard. Many systems treat for hardness, making water softeners unnecessary.

Preventing Pollution

Many of our daily activities contribute to the pollution of Minnesota's surface water and groundwater. Below are some simple steps you can take to ensure that our water continues to be safe and healthy:

- Don't flush leftover medication down the toilet. A number of counties hold regularly scheduled drug take-back events, and many police and sheriff facilities have permanent drop boxes.
- Pick up after your pet.
- Minimize your use of fertilizers and pesticides.
- Clean up chemical spills, and store chemicals safely away from wells, lakes, rivers, streams, and storm water drains.
- Check your car for leaking fluids. When changing car oil, catch and dispose of the oil properly. Don't let it runoff the driveway into the storm drain.