

Water use must be a priority

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Our planet's natural resources are critical to our well-being. Although we use them every day, we seldom think about their importance. We rarely reflect on what our lives would be like without these essential components of our comfort and existence.

As a homebuilder, my focus is mostly on electric use and heating fuels. Water consumption is often overlooked, but we can no longer take water for granted.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense Web site (www.epa.gov/WaterSense), the average family of four uses 400 gallons of water a day. And while the population and the demand on freshwater resources are increasing, supply remains constant.

With this information in mind, we all should recognize our shared interest and have a shared commitment to responsible water use. The Triad is not immune to these challenges, despite a recent wet winter and spring. The area has just as often in recent years sustained drought or near-drought conditions.

While recognizing the problem is the first step in working toward a remedy, we as homebuilders, homebuyers and homeowners also can pitch in and take shared responsibility for developing solutions.

Every home has numerous fixtures with water-use functions involving cleaning, hydration and waste removal. It was state-of-the-art technologies that contributed to the invention of these fixtures, and it is with equal effort that our household water use is being re-evaluated and redesigned for optimal efficiency.

According to the "Handbook of Water Use and Conservation" by Amy Vickers, toilets account for 26.7 percent of household water use, clothes washers 21.7 percent, showers and baths 18.5 percent, faucets 15.7 percent, leaks 13.7 percent, and dishwashers and other items to 3.6 percent.

Before 1994 the standard requirement for a toilet was 3.4 gallons per flush. Today the National Association of Home Builders green scoring program sets a standard of a minimum effective level at 1.28 gallons per flush. It sets the faucet gallons-per-minute requirement at a minimum of 1.5, while the current building code standard is 2.2 gallons per minute.

For every water-using fixture in your home, there is a water-saving alternative.

According to the Water Sense Web site, a person is likely to flush the toilet nearly 140,000 times over his or her lifetime. The EPA's WaterSense program helps consumers identify water-efficient products and programs that meet water efficiency and performance criteria. Replacing older, existing toilets with WaterSense labeled models is expected to save 4,000 gallons a year.

A water-use reduction also can be achieved with WaterSense clothes washers, and there are showerheads and faucets that offer significant reduction in the gallon per minute output.

Additional new technologies, such as hot water recirculation pumps and gray-water recycling systems, can have outstanding results in water-use reduction.

Let us not forget that personal habits are an essential component in the grand picture of human water use. While I am not suggesting we compromise our hygiene, we should all be aware of and responsible for how much water we use.