

OVER THE LAST CENTURY, OUR CONSUMPTION RATE OF FRESHWATER HAS GONE UP RAPIDLY

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

An annual event that started in 1993, World Water Day — observed on March 22 — was established to celebrate freshwater and raise awareness on its importance. The realisation of the value freshwater holds is evident as early as 10,000 years ago, during the first known permanent urban settlement of Jericho (a Palestinian city in the West Bank) which was located near springs and other freshwater sources.

We all know that our existence is highly dependent on the freshwater we have available. However, over the last century, our consumption rate of the resource has gone up rapidly. As the world's population continues to increase, we can expect the demand for freshwater to further rise. This will exacerbate water stress and the risk of water scarcity given the fact that the global freshwater availability is limited. Only 3% of the earth's water is freshwater out of which less than 1% is accessible for our use.

In our densely populated cities, the level of available freshwater is decreasing and the amount of waste water that we are letting out is increasing, which ends up polluting whatever available freshwater we are left with. We need to be mindful about the amount of water we use and play our part to ensure this resource lasts us for a long time.

There are a few measures we can all take to reduce or minimise domestic water use. Here are a few:

Reduce our water consumption by using fixtures and taps that allow for a lower water flow rate

Treat our wastewater and reuse the treated water as appropriate

Ensure 100% of the rainwater (which is fresh, clean) that falls on our property is being collected for use or being percolated into the ground to increase the ground freshwater table.

Install water meters as they provide us with a measure of our actual consumption of water. An awareness of how much water we are actually consuming is one of the first steps in ensuring mindful water use.

Other than water used for domestic purposes, there is a lot of freshwater utilised in other sectors, construction being one of them. One way to minimise water usage during construction is to avoid unnecessary plastering. The use of a plaster is mostly seen as an additional layer to cover up imperfections in masonry work. If the joints in the external masonry can be pointed well using waterproofing compounds, a plaster cover can be avoided. Such exposed masonry walls speak of the history of a building and also stand testimony to the skill involved in masonry coursework. This is just one of several ways in which water use in construction can be reduced.

A mindful and judicious use of freshwater without taking its availability for granted will go a long way in ensuring water security.

The author is the founder of Green Evolution, a sustainable architecture firm

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