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Letter to the Editor: Finding Value in Water Conservation

By Klaus Reichardt
January 10, 2012

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Just as with steps to reduce energy and fuel consumption, new technologies in water conservation are helping us tremendously. Today's restroom fixtures are using far less water than those manufactured twenty or more years ago, and no-water systems, such as waterless urinals, are finding greater acceptance. Further, everything from lightbulbs to cars are now designed to use less energy and fuel.

However, especially when it comes to reducing water consumption, it is going to take more than just new technologies to reduce usage. It is going to take an entirely new mind-set toward how we view our most precious natural resource. To make this change, people around the world must be educated on how to use water more responsibly and, possibly more importantly, why being water responsible is necessary.

An old Chinese proverb exemplifies this need for education:

- If you are planning one year ahead, sow seeds.
- If you are planning 10 years ahead, plant trees.
- But if you are planning 100 years ahead, educate the people.

Educating people on water conservation is more crucial now than ever before. At a Soil and Water Conservation Conference held a couple of years ago, Patrick Lucey, a Canadian water expert, made a comment that reverberated throughout the gathering. He said that “the [world’s] future will be written in water ... and not ink.”

What he meant is that with populations swelling and the demand for water increasing significantly, world powers will become more protective of their own water supplies and take more drastic steps to gather water resources wherever and however they can. The world will be divided between those who have water to meet their current and future needs and those who do not — and those who do not will likely face a variety of hardships in years to come.

As far as growing water needs, just look at what is happening in China right now. Plans are already under way to build 200 new cities of one million people or more in China. These new cities are expected to be completed in the next twenty years. Paving the streets and building homes and factories in these new metropolises is one thing... but finding enough water in China, which has chronic water shortages already, may prove to be far more challenging.

However, there are ways China and the rest of the world can meet this challenge. The first, as we have already mentioned, involves education. Right now, in many parts of the world, especially North America, people give little thought, at least on the consumer level, of how and how much water they use. This must change and can change best through education.

But second, building owners must view steps and technologies that help reduce water consumption as adding value to their properties. At one time, many building owners and managers believed that making their facilities greener and more sustainable was not cost negative.

We are learning now, however, that a green and more sustainable property not only helps building owners save money but also makes the property more desirable to current and future tenants. This is real — and future — value for any building owner/manager.

A frequent speaker and author on water conservation issues, Klaus Reichardt is founder and CEO of Waterless Co. Inc, Vista, Calif. Reichardt founded the company in 1991 with the goal to establish a new market segment in the plumbing fixture industry with water conservation in mind. The company's key product, the Waterless No-Flush urinal, works completely without water and was invented by Reichardt.

He is a member of U.S. Green Building Council since 1999 and joined the University of California Santa Barbara EcoEntrepreneur Advisory Board in 2008. He may be reached at Klaus@waterless.com

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