

Water audits prepare you for the future

Despite a very wet season this past winter, the increase in rainfall didn't make up for many years of below-average water levels. In 2009 California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency in an effort to manage the drought crisis. Since then, many water companies have put into place mandatory water rationing with financial penalties for homeowners who don't comply. Before you find yourself paying more for your water, be prepared for the future by conducting a water audit (don't worry, you don't have to find all your water bills from the past two years).

A water audit analyzes a home's water use and identifies ways to make it more efficient. A water audit's primary focus is to check for leaks in plumbing fixtures, appliances, toilets, faucets, hoses, and sprinklers (as well as ponds, fountains, and pools, where applicable). A water audit also can determine if older appliances and faucets need to be replaced with newer energy-efficient products, which can save both water and money on your monthly utility bills; Simply installing a low-flow showerhead you can save 8,000 gallons of water a year per person.

Beyond doing a physical check for water leaks, a water audit also looks at how much water you can save in daily tasks. Do you take long showers? Do you use the dishwasher and clothes washer only when they are full? Do you turn off the water when you are brushing your teeth? According to the American Water Works Association (AWWA), the average indoor water use per person is 94 gallons of water per day. Simply adjusting everyday habits can cut back on water usage by as much as 30 percent. That's more than 30 gallons a day per person.

With global warming and droughts plaguing the West, water rationing will become mandatory by most utility companies. California's state water department forecasts that the Sierras, which are one of California's main water sources, will have 25 to 40 percent less snow by 2050. A water audit saves money, saves water, and prepares you for an inevitable future. To find out how your household's water use compares to the rest of the country, go to H2O Conserve's website (www.h2oconserve.org) or the Water Use It Wisely site (<http://www.wateruseitwisely.com/100-ways-to-conserve/home-water-audit.phptry>) for their user-friendly H2O calculators. They will show how much water you use and give tips on ways to conserve. For more information on water audits, visit the AWWA website (www.awwa.org).

Source: Direct Client, author, Michelle D. Alderson 7.28.10