



Media Advisory

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California Can Slake its Thirst via Efficiency, Conservation Water Now Wasted is the Best, Fastest, and Cleanest Source for the State

OAKLAND, CALIF – The largest, least expensive, and most environmentally sound source of water to meet California’s future needs is the water currently being wasted in every sector of our economy. That’s the core message of a major new report on urban water use in California released today by the Pacific Institute of Oakland, California. “Waste Not, Want Not: The Potential for Urban Water Conservation in California,” in preparation for three years, is the first report to look comprehensively at residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial water use in the state – and then evaluate the potential for reducing this use through conservation and efficiency.

“After three years of research, we’ve found that California can cut its urban water use by a third through efficient technology, simple changes in policy, and improved public education,” said Dr. Peter H. Gleick, President of the Pacific Institute, a 2003 MacArthur Fellow, and lead author of the report. “What this means is that we can avoid new, expensive, and environmentally destructive water projects and still meet California’s future needs – even if California’s population and economy grow as expected.”

Despite the progress California has already made in improving water efficiency, “Waste Not, Want Not” estimates that up to one-third of California’s current urban water use – more than 2.3 million acre-feet – can be saved using existing technology. And at least 85% of this savings (over 2 million acre-feet) can be saved at costs below what it will cost to tap into new sources of supply and without the social, environmental, and economic impacts that any major water project will bring.

“California’s current water use is not sustainable,” explained Dana Haasz, a report author, expert in water efficiency, and senior researcher at the Pacific Institute. “But the good news is, we don’t have to let our lawns go brown or take short showers to cut water use. Currently available water-efficient technology can help us save water without sacrificing our quality of life. And saving water saves money, cuts water pollution, and reduces energy use – making our air and water cleaner.”

Technology still in development is expected to bring further savings, but the report looks mainly at well-tested tools like low-flush toilets, efficient clothes washers, and improved outdoor efficiency. The report also looks at changes in policy and pricing, public education, and new techniques for commercial, industrial, and institutional water users.

“Saving water is a win for water agencies, a win for our environment, and a win for consumers,” noted Dr. Gary H. Wolff, a senior economist with the Pacific Institute and the author of the report’s economic analysis. “When you account for the other benefits that flow from saving water – like lower energy bills, reduced landscaping costs, and a reduction in waste water – water efficiency measures become very cost-effective, and in some cases are worth doing even if water is free. Our detailed economic analyses show that myths and misunderstandings – not economics – are the biggest barriers to improving our water use efficiency.”

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Report and media materials will be available at: http://www.pacinst.org/reports/urban_usage/