



Watched by her five-year-old daughter Ocean, Catherine Kellendonk fills a basin in her kitchen sink on Friday, as part of her effort to make water portable, or, find multiple uses for water that would ordinarily be sent down the drain. photo by Lyle Aspinall for the Western Wheel

ENVIRONMENT

Good to the last drop: family goes extra mile

Kellendonk family taking water conservation to next level

By Tamara Neely
STAFF REPORTER

A resident of Okotoks has devised a system that reduces her family's water consumption to less than one-tenth of the amount average residents use.

Catherine Kellendonk, fuelled by her concern about water shortages, has been refining her strategy for saving and reusing water for nine months. At the most efficient

point she, and her son and daughter, used approximately 19 litres (5 gallons) per person per day.

The Town's current usage is 354 litres (94 gallons) per person per day and compared with their target of 318 litres (70 gallons) per person per day, the Kellendonk family's reduction is 93 per cent below the Town's target.

In addition to being successful in reducing her water usage, Kellendonk's strategy does not require a big budget for start-up and no effort was made to renovate her plumbing system. Anyone can use her method, all it takes is dedication to make the change in behaviour, a collection of containers to hold water and a couple hosing

tubes.

Kellendonk's system revolves around the concept of capturing and reusing water instead of letting it flow down the drain.

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Okotoks sets water targets

By Tamara Neely
STAFF REPORTER

Conserving water has become an important issue for the Town of Okotoks, and a goal set in 2002 for residents to conserve water will be the focus of an education program.

In 2002 the Town of Okotoks' Water Management Plan set the target of reducing water consumption to 318 litres (70 gallons) per person per day. Current usage is 354 litres (94 gallons) per person per day.

Dave Robertson, operations manager for the Town, said the importance of reaching that goal is growing.

"We have to look at water like a precious resource," said Robertson.

"The reality is that we'll be targeting to get down to that over the next two to three years."

The Town plans to send representatives door-to-door to educate people about the importance of conserving water and methods to do so.

"We're doubling the effort of water conservation and education," said Robertson. "The message we want to get out is there are ways of doing this (reducing consumption)."

"I'm not sure if people know how important it is."

Robertson said that water consumption doubles in the summer due to watering lawns and gardens and he pointed out that last summer three months passed without rain.

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Family's water conservation efforts, continued from page 24

To do so, she uses plastic bins in a variety of sizes: tall garbage bins to collect rainwater; square storage bins to collect laundry wash water and rinse water; tall bins to keep water for flushing toilets; small bowl-size bins to collect water in the sinks from hand washing; and a square bin to scoop water out of the bathtub after showering. The only water that goes straight down the drain in their house is from toilets, teeth brushing, shaving and washing dishes.

The easiest of her household strategies is collecting rainwater. On either side of her house the eavestroughs feed into plastic garbage bins. With one day's rain enough water is collected to care for the lawn.

"I don't use a drop of municipal water to water my yard," said Kellendonk.

This is a significant achievement, since according to Town statistics, there is a surge of water consumption in the summer and 50 per cent of the town's usage is on lawns and gardens.

Kellendonk observed that this change alone has dramatically reduced her household water usage.

The most impressive display of her dedication to the cause is in her capture and reuse of laundry water. She gets



Catherine Kellendonk shows off a 300-gallon reservoir in her backyard on April 18 that is part of her effort to conserve water. photo by Lyle Aspinall for the Western Wheel

six uses from an amount of water that everybody else uses once. To accomplish this feat, Kellendonk must stay alert to the wash, rinse and spin cycles and jump in to divert water.

Her technique involves pointing the hose that drains the washing machine into a plastic bin instead of down into the sewer. An important function of the washing machine that makes her system

possible is that the machine will chug away with the lid up, but will not spin and drain the water with the lid up. This means the machine stops and the quiet signals to Kellendonk to come back to the machine and aim the output hose into a bin, close the lid and the machine spins and drains.

Kellendonk will use one bin for the soapy wash water and save it for the next load of laundry.

She'll use another bin to save the water from the rinse cycle for reuse.

She can do three loads of laundry this way; then she'll wash the floor with the water; then she'll store it in a tall garbage bin in the bathroom and scoop it to flush the toilet.

By the time the water has done the job of washing and rinsing clothes, then washing the floor, it's dark – so peering into the toilet at the Kellendonk residence one can't see down to the bottom of the porcelain bowl. But they flush with every job – they don't "let it mellow if it's yellow".

"You have to give up ever seeing clean water in your toilets," said Kellendonk. "That's my badge."

Shower time is another focus in her water reduction program. A plug in the tub saves the shower water and they scoop it into a storing container to use at toilet flushing time. She only scoops out three gallons of water because she turns the water off while lathering up, and on again to rinse.

Her whole water consumption system has required a commitment to water conservation to make a shift in the running of a household.

"It takes a little while to get into it, but once you teach yourself you'll be able to reduce your water consumption dramatically," said Kellendonk. "A lot of people wouldn't think it's worth all that work and inconvenience for the financial savings. The se-

vere adherence to these strategies was a pilot project for me to see how little could be used per person."

Kellendonk's effort to conserve water is fuelled by her concern about the pattern of drought and water shortages across the globe. Last summer Kellendonk was alarmed by the droughts in the United States and what appeared to her to be a lack of action by the affected municipalities to implement strategies for reducing consumption.

Joshua, Kellendonk's son, believes the methods to conserve water she has introduced into their home are worthwhile.

"I think it's absolutely necessary," said Joshua, 21. "We're not always going to have it so nicely, so it's good to be prepared."

Catching and reserving water for reuse has enabled Joshua to see how much water is actually used – and his friends' eyes have been opened to the amount of water used, for example, when washing hands.

"You don't think about it until someone points it out to you, and even then you have to want to see it," said Joshua. "I definitely think people need to be more aware of their habits, like long showers and driving to work instead of taking the bus. With gas shortages and global warming, the things we're used to doing will go away because these are things that hurt the environment."

The methods she uses in her house can be used by anybody – they don't require specialized equipment or a large budget.

"Most people are thinking of shortening their showers, but there is a lot farther you can go than down to 70 gallons per day," she said.

She would like to see someone take the concept of reusing laundry water and mechanize it so people don't have to oversee the process.

"My setup is a home-made, single-mom's approach, but there's some guy out there, maybe a plumber, who can make an invention that could be a package to sell at the Canadian Tire," she said.

Dave Robertson, operations manager for the Town of Okotoks, is impressed with Kellendonk's manual system and agrees an automated system is needed.

"How many people will dip out their sink to flush their toilets?" said Robertson. "Catherine has gone to great efforts so that water consumption can be reduced way down."

"I applaud her for what she's done. She's ahead of her time."

Robertson pointed out that in the past water wasn't valued like it is today.

"Fifty years ago – even 20 years ago – water was nothing, it had no value," said Robertson. "Look today, you pay \$125 for a litre, it's about what we're paying for gasoline."

Water targets, continued from page 24

"If we hit an extreme drought, and... had to save all the water for people to drink you'd forget your lawns, forget your trees. There are tons of cities around the world that are in that state," Robertson explained. "The water supply we have to sustain the Town of Okotoks is definitely a finite supply. It has to be managed or there will be severe consequences."

According to the Town's website, Okotoks' per capita water use is down 30 per cent since 2000 and is 36 per cent lower than Calgary's per capita water consumption.

In addition to conserving water, lowering water usage equates to lowering greenhouse gas emissions because it takes energy to pump water. So less water pumped means less energy used.

The 30 per cent reduction since 2000 has equated to a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 530,000 kg.

The Town has developed



Dave Robertson, operations manager with the Town of Okotoks, says water conservation is important because it is a precious, finite commodity. The Town recently revamped its water usage targets. photo by Tamara Neely

methods residents can use to reduce water consumption in their homes. For example, don't let water run down the drain while brushing teeth and shaving; wash laundry once a full load is accumulat-

ed; collect water in a rain barrel for yard and garden use; plant native grasses, shrubs and trees since they thrive on natural rain and snowfall. For more tips go to www.okotoks.ca

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