



2011 Canadian Water Attitudes Study: Three Quarters of Canadians Using Toilet as Garbage Can

Average six to 20 litres of clean fresh water wasted with every flush; most Canadians have “no concept” of the real value of water, says UN water expert

TORONTO, March 21, 2011 – While the majority of Canadians (55 per cent) continue to believe that fresh water is the country’s most important natural resource and say they are trying reasonably hard to conserve it (78 per cent), almost three quarters (72 per cent) admit to flushing items down the toilet that they could dispose of in another manner. Left-over food, hair, bugs and cigarette butts lead the list of items discarded in toilets across the nation, wasting an average of six to 20 litres of fresh, clean water with each flush.

According to the fourth annual Canadian Water Attitudes Study, commissioned by RBC and Unilever and endorsed by the Canadian Partnership Initiative of the United Nations Water for Life Decade, Albertans (83 per cent) are most likely to admit to flushing items they could dispose of in another manner, and Quebecers least likely (65 per cent). And young Canadians, 18 to 34, are much more likely than those aged 55 plus to engage in the offending behaviour (84 per cent vs. 63 per cent, respectively).

Yet, Canadians’ knowledge of the quality of the water in their toilet, and the volume wasted, is high. Eight in 10 (80 per cent) know the water in their toilet is just as clean as the water coming out of their faucet, and three quarters (76 per cent) are aware that nearly half (45 per cent) of water used in the home is flushed down the toilet.

“This data highlights, once again, that Canadians are not making the connection between their personal water use and the true value of water,” says Bob Sandford, EPCOR Chair, Canadian Partnership Initiative of the UN Water for Life Decade. “They claim to care about conserving it, yet knowingly engage in water wasting activities, including using fresh, clean water to dispose of garbage. Canadians need to understand that water is a finite resource and there are significant social and economic implications related to wasting it.”

Canadians use, on average, 329 liters of water a day¹. According to the survey, nearly seven in 10 (67 per cent) Canadians underestimated this amount. Canadian’s water wasting habits such as leaving the water running when doing the dishes (46 per cent) and hosing down the driveway (17 per cent) are contributing to high water usage.

¹ Environment Canada. *Topic 6. Water Conservation – Every Drop Counts!* <http://www.ec.gc.ca/eau-water/default.asp?lang=en&n=E85F9FC8-1>. Accessed March 2011



Canadians don't know what they pay for water

According to the study, Canadians are in the dark when it comes to the cost of water. While six in 10 (61 per cent) admit they do not know how much their household currently pays for water, they actually have a strong opinion about its cost: seven in 10 (70 per cent) believe that the unknown price is high enough to ensure water is treated as a valuable resource.

“Water is a real bargain in Canada, which is another reason Canadians have no concept of its value,” says Sandford. “Compared to other developed nations, Canadians pay very little to have water delivered to their homes. In France, water costs four times more, and in Germany, almost seven times more. Not surprisingly, average daily domestic water use in these countries is less than half of what it is in Canada. Until Canadians make the connection between personal use of water and its true value, our water wasting habits will continue.”

2011 Canadian Water Attitudes Study: Additional Themes /Regional Trends/Tracking Data

Following are additional highlights from the 2011 Canadian Water Attitudes Study, which has tracked Canadians perceptions and attitudes towards water quality and conservation for the past four years.

1) Canadians try a bit harder to save electricity than water

- Only four in 10 (40 percent) Canadians make the connection between water and electricity, understanding that it requires energy to treat and pump water; one-third (32 per cent) don't think at all about the connection
- Nine in 10 (86 per cent) Canadians say they try at least reasonably hard to conserve electricity, while only eight in 10 (78 per cent) say they try at least reasonably hard to conserve water

2) Confidence in Canada's drinking water growing

- Canadians' level of confidence in the safety and quality of Canada's drinking water has increased significantly over the past two years, from 72 per cent in 2009 to 86 per cent in 2011; Confidence is highest in British Columbia, at 92 per cent, and lowest in Quebec, at 69 per cent
- Nine in 10 Canadians (91 per cent) who drink tap water in their home are confident in its safety and quality; confidence is highest in Ontario at 97 per cent per cent, and lowest in Quebec at 83 per cent
- When it comes to the source of water they “typically” drink, almost half (48 per cent) drink water directly from their tap; one-third (28 per cent) drink filtered water; two in 10 (21 per cent) drink bottled water and 14 per cent drink water from a large-jug cooler



3) Confidence in Canada's long-term supply of water has also Increased

- Canadians' level of confidence that Canada has enough freshwater for the long-term has increased over the past two years, from 70 per cent in 2009 to 77 per cent in 2011; confidence is highest in British Columbia, at 84 per cent; Quebecers are disproportionately less confident at 63 per cent

4) Canadians increasingly concerned about the quality of water in Canada's lakes

- Almost nine in 10 (87 per cent) Canadians are concerned about the quality of water in lakes where they swim; Quebecers are most concerned (90 per cent), followed by Ontarians and Maritimes (both 88 per cent)
- Most Canadians (63 per cent) believe that the quality of their swimming lakes is getting worse

About the Survey

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted between January 10-17, 2011, on behalf of RBC and Unilever and sponsored by the UN Water for Life Decade. A sample of 2,066 adults from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of ± 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had the entire population of adults in Canada been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

About Canadian Partnership Initiative in support of the United Nations Water for Life Decade

The United Nations Water for Life Decade is a globally proclaimed decade for action on water quality and availability issues. While each country in the world will be focusing on its own water quality and availability issues within the larger context of the global fresh water situation, the Canadian initiative has been defined by a nation-wide public and private sector partnership aimed at identifying and responding to regional and national water issues. The United Nations Water for Life initiative in Canada exists to put Canadian water issues into a global context. The Canadian United Nations Water for Life partnership initiative is housed, and has its research home in the Western Watersheds Climate Research Collaborative at the Biogeosciences Institute at the University of Calgary.

About RBC

RBC is one of North America's leading diversified financial services companies and among the largest banks in the world, as measured by market capitalization. It employs approximately 79,000 people who serve more than 18 million personal, business, public sector and institutional clients through offices in more than 50 countries. RBC is recognized as one of the world's



financial, social and environmental leaders and is listed on the 2010-2011 Dow Jones Sustainability World Index and the DJSI North American Index. RBC has been named one of Canada's Greenest Employers, one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers, one of Canada's 50 Most Socially Responsible Corporations and one of the Best Workplaces in Canada. In 2010, RBC contributed \$130 million to community causes worldwide, through donations and sponsorships. The RBC Blue Water Project is a 10-year, \$50 million philanthropic commitment to supporting organizations that protect watersheds and ensure access to clean drinking water. Since 2007, RBC has committed over \$27 million to more than 350 organizations worldwide working in this area. RBC is a sponsor of Canada Water Week and Water: the Exhibition at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. For more information, visit www.rbc.com/bluewater.

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