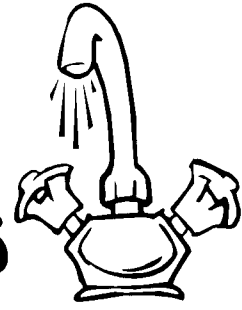


A World Water Supply Crisis Looms



WATER IS ESSENTIAL FOR HUMAN LIFE.

Although 70 percent of the Earth's surface is covered by water, scientists warn that a water supply crisis looms due to the effects of climate change, pollution and increasing human demand.

Part of the problem is that 97.5 percent of all water on Earth is saltwater - unusable for human consumption. Of the remaining 2.5 percent, the majority is locked up in the icecaps of Antarctica and Greenland or other remote areas. In fact, less than 0.1 percent of the world's water is accessible for direct human use in the form of freshwater lakes, rivers, reservoirs or shallow underground sources.

Water is essential for human life - not only for drinking, but also to grow food and for many industrial and manufacturing processes such as generating electricity.

Population increase and the desire for better standards of living are placing increased demands on the

world's water supply. The world's population tripled to six billion in the 20th century, and its use of water resources grew six-fold in that time. It is expected that the world's population will increase another 40 to 50

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percent in the next 50 years and that this increase, combined with even greater use for industry and agriculture, will seriously strain the water supply.

Already, underground water levels are dropping by three metres a year in the developing world. At the same time, regional water supplies are being polluted as nations like China and

India become increasingly industrialized.

One of the biggest threats to a predictable water supply is climate change. Though global warming may not reduce the overall supply of water, it is expected to dramatically shift weather patterns, resulting in extreme weather like **droughts** and flooding - which will severely affect water availability to a given region or population. As well, when glaciers melt, important river systems dry up. For example, scientists anticipate that the Himalayan glaciers may disappear by 2030. These glaciers feed the Ganges River, which supplies fresh water to almost 500 million people in India.

Already today, more than one in six people don't have access to clean drinking water, and 20 percent of the world's population in 30 countries currently face water shortages. The UN warns that by 2025, this will increase to 30 percent of the world's population in 50 countries. ★

Consumption: To use something up.

Drought: A long spell of very dry weather.