

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Reducing Water Use Can Benefit Your Drinking Water and Wastewater Systems By Sharon Skipton, UNL Extension Water Quality Educator



Using less water reduces wear and tear on your water distribution system, and reduces energy use. In addition, it reduces the amount of wastewater that needs to be treated, which can help extend the life of your septic system. The toilet, shower, and clothes washer account for two-thirds of the water used in an average household. To use less water, start with appliances and fixtures that use the greatest amounts of water.

Spread out your water use if you use a septic system for wastewater treatment. Hydraulic overloading, where too much water enters the system in a short period of time, is the number one cause of septic system failure. Avoid hydraulic overloading by washing only one or two loads of laundry a day.

About 20% of all toilets leak. You can lose 200 or more gallons of water a day from a leaky toilet. To check your toilet, put a few drops of food dye in the toilet tank. If, after 15 minutes, color appears in the bowl, you have a leak that should be repaired. Typically, the toilet flapper needs replacement.

A toilet installed prior to 1993 may use up to 8 gallons of water per flush. New toilets use 1.6 gallons per flush. Dual flush toilets use 0.8 gallons (for urine) and 1.6 gallons (for solids) per flush. Toilet dams, 1.6 gallon flappers, or water-filled plastic containers can be installed in older toilet tanks, but reduced flow can affect flushing. About 3 gallons of water may be needed in the tank to flush properly. Avoid using bricks that can crumble and affect operation.

Adjust clothes washer water levels to the laundry load size and soil level. Some washers sense the load size and soil of water and fabric and adjust the water level accordingly. Water-efficient clothes washers use about 1/3 as much water as traditional washers. Look at labels and compare the amount of water used for the same tub capacity.

Older shower heads can use 6 to 8 gallons of water per minute when fully opened. As of 1994, shower heads use no more than 2.5 gallons per minute. A new trend toward shower “systems,” with multiple heads and nozzles, is not water efficient. They often use 6, 8, or even 10 gallons per minute.

By replacing fixtures and appliances as they wear out with water-efficient units, and being conscious of your water use, you will be conserving water and lengthening the lifespan of your septic system.