

MAJORITY OF CANADIANS CONSIDER WATER TO BE CANADA'S MOST IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCE

New study reveals more people concerned about quality and availability of freshwater than oil, fisheries, or forests – yet use 329 litres per day

TORONTO, ON March 17, 2009 - The majority of Canadians (53 per cent) rank freshwater as the country's most important natural resource; ahead of forests (20 per cent), agriculture/farmland (14 per cent), oil (eight per cent) and fisheries (two per cent), according to the 2009 Canadian Water Attitudes Study released today. More than eight in 10 think Canada will have a freshwater shortage problem if we do not pay attention to conservation. But despite this appreciation of the value of freshwater, Canadians continue to waste it at alarming rates, using five times more water per day than they think they do.

This level of consumption must change, says leading water expert Bob Sandford, following today's release of the 2009 Canadian Water Attitudes Study, a national opinion survey on Canadians' awareness, perceptions and habits related to freshwater. The survey, in its second year, was commissioned by Unilever and RBC, and is endorsed by the Canadian Partnership Initiative of the United Nations Water for Life Decade.

"We have a disturbing paradox in Canada when it comes to our freshwater," says Bob Sandford, chair, Canadian Partnership Initiative of the UN Water for Life Decade. "On the one hand, Canadians appear to value water as a crucial natural resource and understand that conservation of this precious resource is critical. Yet unfortunately at the same time, they don't seem to know how much water they use each day or where it comes from."

The Canadian Water Attitudes Study indicates that Canadians believe they use an average of 66 litres of water per day, for drinking, showering, bathing, toilet flushing, laundry and dishwashing. In fact, they actually use five times more – with an actual consumption of about 329 litres per day. Canadians not only underestimate the amount of water they use, but their water habits actually worsened in 2009. For example, the length of showers taken by Canadians increased from 2008 to 2009. Canadians rank second only to the United States in terms of highest per capita water use in the developed world. In comparison, Europeans consume less than half of the water Canadians do.ⁱ

There are both serious financial and environmental implications to wasting water.

"While Canadians understand the value of water, they don't think about its cost or the larger impact on the environment. Irresponsible and inefficient water use directly contributes to climate change. For example, running a tap for five minutes uses as much energy as leaving a 60-watt lightbulb burning for 14 hours,"ⁱⁱ says Sandford. "If water is our most important natural resource, as I believe it is, we need to start using it more responsibly and efficiently, for our country and for the planet."

"Irresponsible use of water has environmental implications for today, but even more so, for tomorrow," says John Coyne, vice president, legal and corporate affairs for Unilever Canada. "This study highlights the need for increased awareness about how Canadians use water. The inefficient use of water is a critical dialogue in which governments, NGO's, business and individuals must engage. For our part, Unilever is committed to leading by example as we reduce our water footprint from operations and supply chain through to the consumer use of our products."

“Freshwater is essential for human health and all life on earth, so it’s really ‘the’ cause for the ages,” said Shari Austin, vice president, corporate citizenship, RBC. “It’s important for people to understand the value and vulnerability of our water resources, which is why we undertook this survey. That’s also one of the reasons we created the RBC Blue Water Project, our grant program of \$50 million over ten years to help protect our watersheds and ensure access to clean drinking water.”

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE POLL: Additional Key Themes/Regional Trends

Pollutants and mass exports perceived as biggest threats to Canada’s freshwater supply

- Canadians believe the following to be the biggest threats to Canada’s freshwater supply: run-off pollutants from land to water (19 per cent); mass export of water to the US (17 per cent); illegal dumping of toxins (12 per cent); mismanagement of water by municipal, provincial and federal governments (12 per cent); global warming and climate change (eight per cent)
- Only six per cent of Canadians believe wasteful use of water by consumers to be a threat to Canada’s freshwater supply

Canadians’ concern for water equals concern for stability of financial markets

- Eighty-five per cent of Canadians say they are “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about the stability of the financial markets; while 84 per cent of Canadians say the same about the long-term supply/quality of Canada’s freshwater
- More Quebecers are concerned about the long-term supply and quality of Canada’s freshwater (80 per cent) than the stability of the financial markets (72 per cent)
- Eighty-nine per cent of Canadians believe there is a growing freshwater crisis on the planet, and 66 per cent think that Canada is at risk of freshwater supply shortages

Canadians losing confidence in our water supply and safety

- Confidence that Canada has enough freshwater for the long term has declined by 11 points, from 81 per cent in 2008 to 70 per cent in 2009
- Canadians’ confidence in their region’s available water has declined, from 84 per cent in 2008 to 74 per cent in 2009
- Quebecers (58 per cent) have the least amount of confidence that Canada has enough freshwater to meet its long-term needs
- Quebecers (68 per cent) and Albertans (67 per cent) have the least amount of confidence that their region has enough freshwater to meet their needs

Attitudes toward water safety are changing

- Canadians’ confidence in the safety of Canada’s water supply has declined, from 81 per cent in 2008 to 72 per cent in 2009
- Quebecers (54 per cent) have the least confidence in the safety and quality of Canada’s water supply
- While most Canadians (68 per cent) still drink their tap water, only 4 in 10 (41 per cent) drink it directly from the tap without first filtering or boiling
- One-third of Canadians do not drink the tap water in their home

Attitudes toward conservation

- Ninety-five per cent of Canadians believe it is important to conserve freshwater on an ongoing basis
- Most people (86 per cent) believe they are making reasonable efforts to conserve freshwater
- Only 30 per cent believe that corporations, businesses and industry are making reasonable efforts to conserve freshwater
- Significantly more Canadians put effort into electricity conservation than water conservation (28 per cent versus 3 per cent)
- Only 40 per cent of the population knows how much they pay for water each month, versus 73 per cent who know what they pay for electricity
- Seventy-two per cent of homes in the Prairies say they have water metres; this compares to 39 per cent of Canadians in general
- Quebecers (63 per cent) are most likely to know that a bath uses more water than a 10-minute shower
- Albertans (90 per cent) are most likely to say that they are making reasonable efforts to conserve freshwater; Atlantic Canadians (83 per cent) are least likely to say this

About the Survey

The 2009 Canadian Water Attitudes Study included an online survey administered by Ipsos Reid from February 5 to 12, 2009. It included a sample of 2,165 adult Canadians from the general population across Canada. The results are considered accurate to within ± 2.2 per cent 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had the entire adult population in Canada been polled. The data were weighted by region, age and sex according to 2006 Census data.

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 University of Lethbridge.

For more information about the Canadian partnership initiative in support of the United Nations Water For Life Decade visit www.thinkwater.ca.

About Unilever

Unilever, one of the world's largest consumer products companies, adds vitality to life by meeting everyday needs for nutrition, hygiene and personal care. Every day, 150 million people choose Unilever brands to feed their families, and to clean themselves and their homes. Unilever is best known in Canada by brands such as Bece[®], Dove[®], Lipton[®], Red Rose[®], Slim-Fast[®], Hellmann's[®], Knorr[®], Breyers[®], Popsicle[®], Bertolli[®], AXE[®], Vaseline[®], Vim[®], Q-Tips[®], Suave[®], Sunsilk[®], and Degree[®].

With a steadfast commitment to water sustainability, Unilever strives to lead by example and remains committed to further reducing its water footprint. For ten years running, Unilever has been acknowledged as the food industry category leader on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index for their environmental policies. For the fourth year running, Unilever was also named amongst the 'Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World' by Corporate Knights and Innovest, an international finance and investment advisory firm. Unilever is also an active participant in several water sustainability programs across Canada including EcoVoyageurs, a national school-based education program in which students are encouraged to reduce their own 'footprint' in five key areas - transportation, food, waste, water and packaging. In 2008, Unilever Canada launched Go Blue, a national awareness program which to educate consumers about steps they can take to conserve water in their daily lives. For more information, visit www.unilever.com.

About RBC

Royal Bank of Canada (RY on TSX and NYSE) and its subsidiaries operate under the master brand name RBC. Canada's largest bank as measured by assets and market capitalization, RBC is also 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 more than 80,000 full- and part-time employees who serve more than 18 million personal, business, public sector and institutional clients through offices in Canada, the U.S. and 52 other countries.

RBC is listed on the 2008-2009 Dow Jones Sustainability Index, recognizing the world's financial, social and environmental corporate leaders, as well as the Jantzi Social Index and the FTSE4Good Index. The company was recently named to the "Global 100: Most Sustainable Corporations in the World" 2009 list. RBC was also among 67 companies and one of only 18 financial institutions worldwide named to the Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index 2008, a prestigious honour roll of world leaders at understanding and managing the financial risks and opportunities resulting from climate change. For more information, visit www.rbc.com/bluewater.

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