

Clothing, food and electricity impact most on water footprint

November 14 2011

Australians have been working hard to cut down their household's daily water consumption, however a new study in the latest edition of *Building Research & Information* reveals that clothing, food and electricity are the three biggest culprits for a household's high water usage.

The study's author, Dr Robert Crawford from the University of Melbourne said people were very aware of using [water](#) efficient appliances, having shorter showers and not leaving taps running, but the invisible, behind the scenes [water usage](#) involved with creating the electricity and other goods and services consumed by our households, was far more significant and alarming.

“In order to produce any item, from a pair of jeans to a toaster, water is required to obtain raw materials, in the manufacturing process, in transportation and to sell the item. Every item or service purchased by a household has a long line of resources and water usage,” Dr Crawford said.

The indirect, or embodied, water usage of an entire household over 50 years - which includes the construction and maintenance of the house, all belongings, food, clothing and other consumable items, financial services, cars and holidays – is equivalent to filling 54 Olympic swimming pools. This represents 94% of a household's water footprint.

In contrast, the direct water used by households – for drinking, washing, showering, watering, cooking and cleaning – is equivalent to only 4

Olympic swimming pools, or 6% of the household's water demand over 50 years.

“We don't tend to think about the resources that have gone into making the products that we purchase on an everyday basis. The more clothes we buy, the more food we eat, the more water we consume, Dr Crawford said.

“While of course it's important for households to continue to reduce direct water usage, choosing to buy second hand clothing and furniture, minimizing food wastage and cutting down on electricity use will have a much greater impact on reducing a household's water footprint.

“Many people upgrade dishwashers and washing machines to save water, however it is important to also think about the water involved with producing these items. Sometimes this water demand may outweigh the potential water savings.

“Another important aspect in reducing a household's water footprint, is building smaller and longer-lasting housing. This means we need less furniture to fill them and less energy to run them.

“A more holistic approach to water conservation is going to be necessary in order to ensure the sustainable use of available water resources within Australian cities.”

More information: To read the article, refer to [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10 ... 09613218.2011.584212](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10...09613218.2011.584212)

Provided by University of Melbourne

Citation: Clothing, food and electricity impact most on water footprint (2011, November 14)
retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-food-electricity-impact-footprint.html>

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