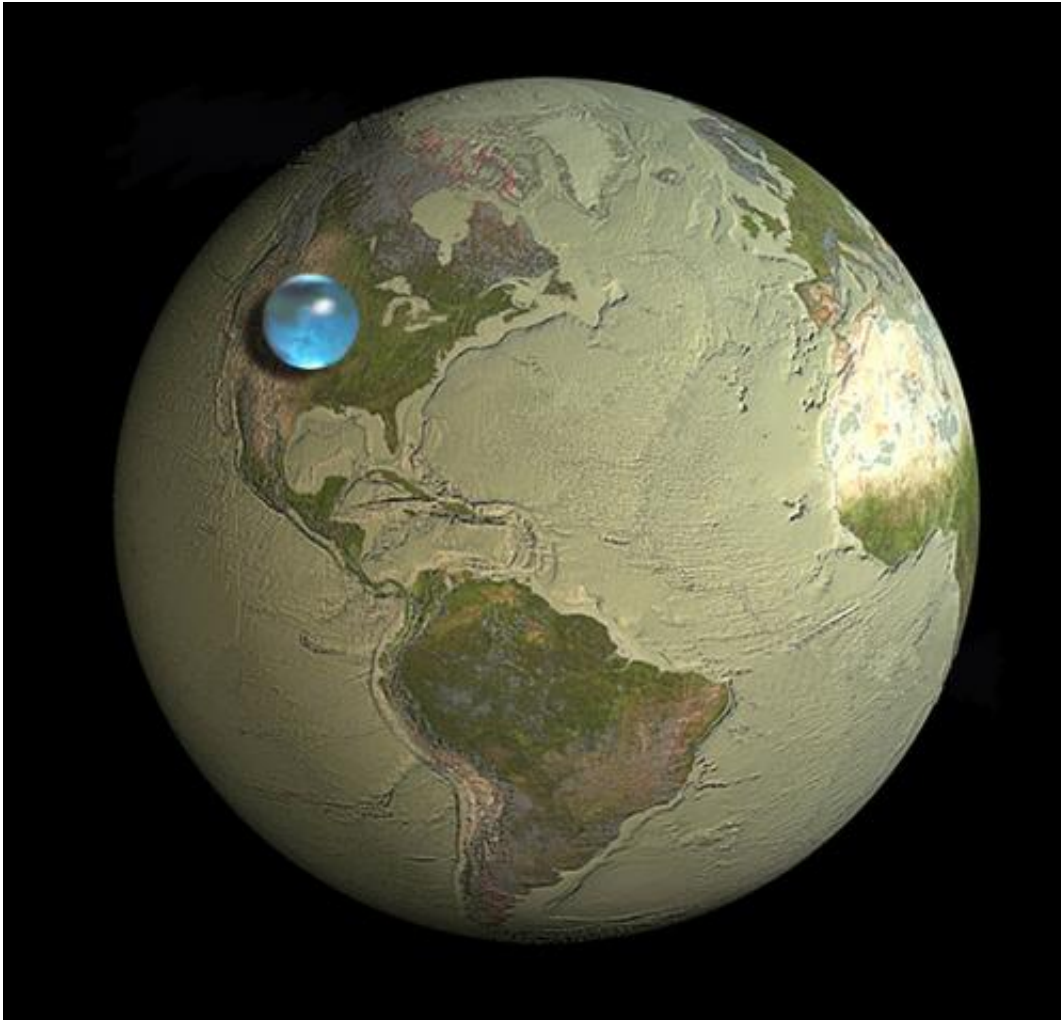


Earth has less water than you think

May 8 2012, by Jason Major



All the water on Earth would fit into a sphere 860 miles (1,385 km) wide. Credit: Jack Cook/WHOI/USGS

If you were to take all of the water on Earth—all of the fresh water, sea

water, ground water, water vapor and water inside our bodies—take all of it and somehow collect it into a single, giant sphere of liquid, how big do you think it would be?

According to the U. S. Geological Survey, it would make a ball 860 miles (1,385 km) in diameter, about as wide edge-to-edge as the distance between Salt Lake City to Topeka, Kansas. That's it. Take all the [water](#) on [Earth](#) and you'd have a blue sphere less than a third the size of the Moon.

Feeling a little thirsty?

And this takes into consideration all the Earth's water... even the stuff humans can't drink or directly access, like salt water, water vapor in the atmosphere and the water locked up in the ice caps. In fact, if you were to take into consideration only the fresh water on Earth (which is 2.5% of the total) you'd get a much smaller sphere... less than 100 miles (160 km) across.

Even though we think of reservoirs, lakes and rivers when we picture Earth's fresh water supply, in reality most of it is beneath the surface—up to 2 million cubic miles (8.4 million cubic km) of Earth's available fresh water is underground. But the vast majority of it—over 7 million cubic miles (29.2 cubic km) is in the ice sheets that cover Antarctica and Greenland.

Of course, the illustration above (made by Jack Cook at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution) belies the real size and mass of such a sphere of pure liquid water. The total amount of water contained within would still be quite impressive—over 332.5 million cubic miles (1,386 million cubic km)! (A single cubic mile of water equals 1.1 trillion gallons.) Still, people tend to be surprised at the size of such a hypothetical sphere compared with our planet as a whole, especially when they've become

used to the description of Earth as a "watery world".

Makes one a little less apt to take it for granted.

Read more on the USGS site [here](#), and check out some facts on reducing your water usage [here](#).

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