

# **A Dry Region, A Shared Responsibility**

## **Summary**

The Okanagan Valley boasts stunning scenery, lively communities, and prosperous agriculture, yet it ranks among the driest areas in Canada. With changing climate patterns and increasingly prolonged and hotter summers, the importance of conserving every drop of water intensifies. As a student, staff member, or visitor at Okanagan College, we all share the responsibility of protecting our region's most valuable resource: **Water**.

At Okanagan College, we advocate setting standards through our actions. Through creative enhancements in our campus facilities and outdoor designs that prioritize water conservation, we are constantly striving to reduce our ecological footprint. However, we cannot achieve this goal without collaboration. A significant change happens when our whole community participates in this initiative, including students, staff, and faculty. Together, we can guarantee a sustainable water future for the Valley and our campuses.

## **1. Water stress in the Okanagan Valley**

### **1.1 The Facts:**

- The Okanagan is among the driest areas in Canada.
- The yearly average from 1980 to 2020 says Kelowna receives an average yearly rainfall of about 380 mm, making it one of the driest regions in Canada.
- Nonetheless, it provides farming, tourism, and wildlife for more than 250,000 inhabitants.
- The area experiences the least amount of water available per person in the nation, even lower than certain arid areas in the United States.
- In the summer droughts, there is significant competition for the scarce water supply among agriculture, lawns, and residential use. The need for water is expected to rise by 40% by the year 2040, influenced by population expansion and climate change.

(Please refer to <https://obwb.ca/> for more details and planning on water conservation in the Okanagan Valley.)

### **1.2 The Risk:**

- Water scarcity affects nearby farming, increases the risk of wildfires, impacts wildlife, and can compromise the quality of municipal water.

- Changes in the climate are leading to decreased snow accumulation in the mountains and accelerating the melting of snow in spring, resulting in diminished water supply later in the year.

## **2. Regional Efforts: Initiatives in the Valley**

The Okanagan is acting through intelligent and cooperative strategies:

- The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) spearheads water management throughout the valley by financing research, developing policies, and supporting local conservation initiatives.
- Make Water Work is a valley-wide outdoor campaign aimed at promoting more efficient and reduced water usage among residents.
- Cities such as Kelowna and Penticton have implemented tiered pricing for water and offered rebates for smart irrigation to foster conservation.
- Farmers are utilizing drip irrigation methods and soil moisture sensors to decrease water usage while still maintaining productive crops.
- These efforts demonstrate how combining actions across various sectors can create a significant impact.

## **How We Can Help: Small Steps, Big Impacts**

Everyone at OC can contribute by

- Notify Facilities about dripping faucets or toilets that continuously run.
- Restrict lawn irrigation or, even better, adopt drought-tolerant gardens at home.
- Shut off the faucet while handwashing or brushing our teeth.
- Use our reusable bottle and avoid purchasing bottled water.
- Promote discussions on water conservation in classes, clubs, and sports teams.
- Advocate water-efficient policies and landscaping that requires less water during dry spells.