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EARTHTALK FOR YOUNG READERS

Week of 10/17/2004

From Stacy Clark, Youth Editor of E/The Environmental Magazine

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Dear EarthTalk, Young Readers: My dad keeps telling me not to waste water. He makes it sound like we could actually run out some day. Could we? Isn't there plenty of water to go around?

—Gillian B., Seattle, WA

Gillian, I'm sure you're not the only person living in Seattle who has a hard time understanding why conserving water is so important. After all, it rains more than 200 days a year in Seattle! But your dad makes a good point when you consider the bigger picture. Less than one percent of all the water in the world is available as fresh water that we can use! This one percent breaks down to water stored in soil and rocks underground (groundwater), and water stored in lakes, rivers, and streams (surface water). Whether we drill wells to pump groundwater or build reservoirs to contain surface water, the amount of water available at any given time remains fairly constant. But with world population growing each year, the demand for fresh water is growing too. So, the water we do have will have to be shared by even more users. And it's not just more people who will have to share – it's agriculture and manufacturing too! In the United States, for example, agricultural production alone uses up 42 percent! Wow! That's almost half our available fresh water supply! Electrical power production (the non-renewable kind) consumes 39 percent. Our homes, offices and hotels require 11 percent, and eight percent is used in all other types of manufacturing and mining.

So, when you think about it, there really isn't any water to waste!

And, with so many increasing demands on our water, we need to remember too that fresh water is not spread evenly around the planet. Some places have enough available fresh water to go around, while other areas have almost none. So conserving water is a really good habit to get into – no matter where we live – because what we save, someone else may be able to use.

GOT AN ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTION? Send it to: EARTH TALK for YOUNG READERS, c/o E/The Environmental Magazine, P.O. Box 5098, Westport, CT 06881; submit your question at: www.emagazine.com; or e-mail us at: stacy@emagazine.com.



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