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Glass remains half empty

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Water-guzzling Canadians are in for a shock if conservation and water supply isn't reformed in the face of climate change, a new study says.

Simon Fraser University's Adaptation to Climate Change Team (ACT) released a report yesterday that says that climate change has effected an alarming shift in the way water moves and that wasteful and unprepared Canada is not ready for the consequences.

Not only does Canada do a bad job managing water as a resource, the country's infrastructure is already being affected by increasingly extreme weather, such as intense rainfall and flooding, and more prolonged droughts in other areas, the report says.

"There is no place that hasn't been affected," says lead author Bob Sandford. "Because of the circumstances, water conservation is the first, most intelligent step we can take. But we are the world's greatest water guzzlers."

The report found that half of every dollar paid out by insurance companies in the country is for water damage — a sign that Canadians are not prepared for the increasingly unstable hydro-climatic conditions that are already taking their toll on the economy.

In fact, the insurance corporations have been the biggest lobbyists for reform because of the impact storms and disasters are having.

"When the insurance companies are the ones raising the alarm, the debate is over," Sandford says. Even sources of safe drinking water are at risk, the report states.

ACT has proposed a number of recommendations, including immediately creating national and regional water conservation guidelines — which currently don't exist.

In B.C., Sandford says it's critical the province —prone to flooding, drought and forest fires — modernize the Water Act and establish groundwater policies.

"B.C. has huge vulnerabilities but the Water Act is 150 years out of date," Sandford says.

"Reform is not an option anymore, it's inevitable."

Metro Vancouver