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Water: Lifeblood of the Earth

Johanna Benschop (Australia)

[Submitted Paper]

Of the world's total water supply, 95.1% is salt water. Fresh water accounts for nearly 5% of the total supply. Almost all of this is in ice or is underground. It is only a tiny amount, 0.01% that is not in ice or underground. FUTURE'S THIRST WORSE THAN FAMINE.

Clean water is a scarce resource to Al Miller, the Assistant Director of Advisory Services for the University of Wisconsin, Seagrant.

The amount of fresh water available after evaporation and run-off is barely enough, Miller said.

"Despite the precious nature of water, we place a great deal of pressure on it," Miller said. "The problem is resource consumption, increased thirst, and depletion of non-reusable resources.

An example of how modernisation hurts the water supply is in China. Urbanising means flush toilets, industry and a Chinese move up on the food chain. The stress on China's water resource became so severe that over 82 million people live with a water shortage.

Another problem is that countries withdraw non-renewable water, Miller said. In Libya, underground water is withdrawn at a tremendous rate to irrigate land.

"The source of water in Libya will last 40 to 60 years," Miller said. "When it runs out I don't know what they will turn to."

Additionally, pollution of water is endangering the world's fresh water supply. Water is polluted by agriculture, residential and industrial wastes.

Polluted water is a problem in Peru, Miller said. Twenty-nine percent of the poor's income is spent on boiling water to make it safe.

"Other countries spend a lot of money to have clean water," Miller said. "And in the United States we basically get it for free. However, this may not last for long."

Population growth also places a great deal of pressure on water, Miller said. Mexico will have a tremendous water shortage if its population continues to increase at a high rate.

“This isn’t Mexico’s problem, it is our problem,” Miller said. “They don’t have the resources to deal with the problem because it would take bold solutions and expensive options.”

The future of the world’s water supply is in trouble, Miller said. Already, 5.3 billion people experience a water shortage. And in 2050 half the world will not have enough water.

Miller said we have to address the global water supply now.

“I think the danger is not addressing the problem,” Miller said. “We may have a chance if we deal with the issue now.”

The United States needs to help with foreign policy, Miller said. Otherwise, he predicts the water supply will cause wars.

“We need to assist developing countries, promote alternatives to dispute water resolutions, and support technical improvements,” Miller said.

(The Global Water Supply is in Danger by Jennifer Gundry, spring 1996)

Another way of looking at it:

- FACT: The total quantity of water on the earth’s surface remains essentially constant.
- FACT: The world’s water is universal, and knows no borders.
 - Your bore water is also my groundwater.
 - The world’s overproduction of bottled drinks becomes your thirst.
 - Your drainage of nuclear waste is my polluted rainwater.
 - Your change of waterways is for me a desert.
 - The most essential component in the world’s manufacturing/industry is water.
 - The most essential component in our bodies is water. Water = Life.

I will organise a discussion workshop on these issues during this conference.