

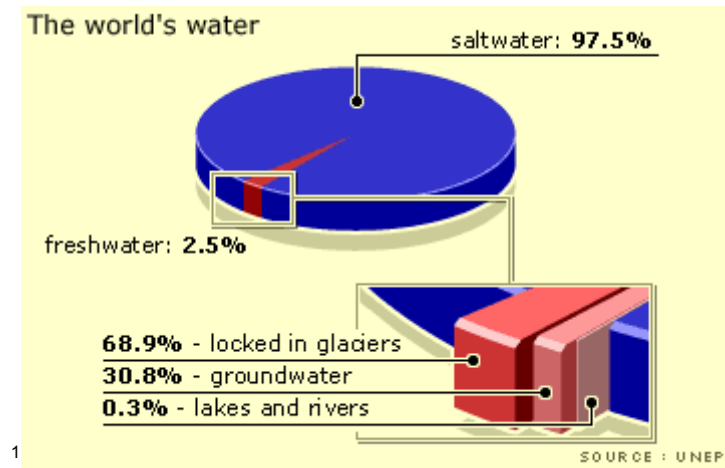
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BRIEFING SHEETS: WATER

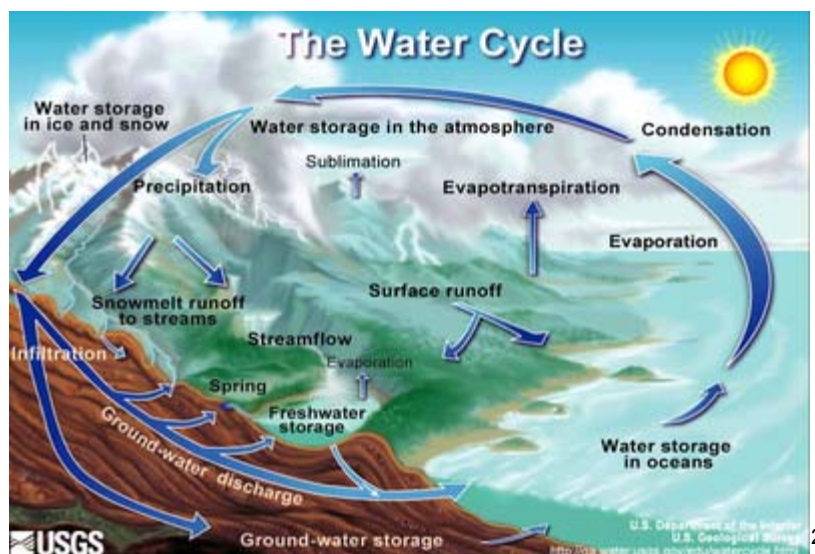


Global context

The amount of water on Earth is fixed. Less than 0.01% of the planet's 1.4 billion cubic kilometres is easily accessible freshwater in lakes and rivers.



Earth's water is always in movement, and the water cycle, also known as the hydrologic cycle, describes the continuous movement of water on, above, and below the surface of the Earth.



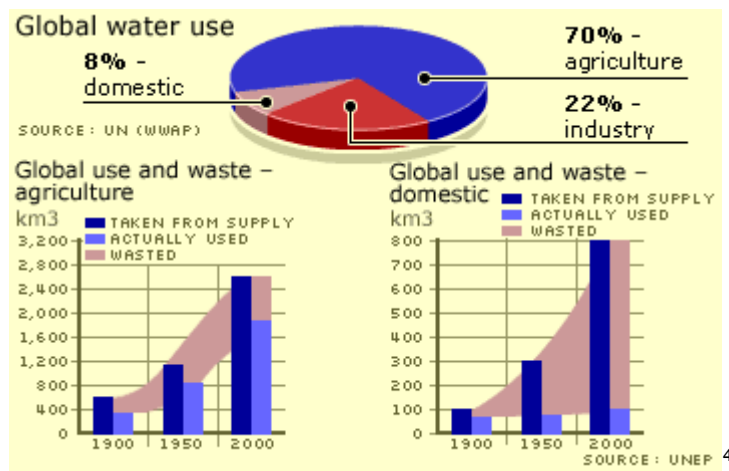
In 1999 the UN Environment Programme reported that global climate change and water shortage were the two most worrying problems for this millennium. In 2001 the World Health Organisation estimated that over one billion people were affected by water shortages and contamination and by 2025 this is expected to increase to 5.5 billion or two thirds of the world's population. This has massive health implications for example every day, each year diarrhoeal diseases cause an estimated 1.5 million deaths of children.³

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/world/2003/world_forum/water/default.stm#

² <http://ga.water.usgs.gov/edu/watercycle.html>

³ World Health Organisation, Fact sheet N°330, August 2009

Of all the natural resources necessary to ensure human health water is one of the most important. If we fail to take action now there will be a shortfall of 20 per cent by 2030.



Agriculture is the world's biggest water user– it takes at least 2,000 litres to produce enough food for one person for one day⁵.

Already there is clear evidence of severe pressure on water resources in the South East and East of England and similar pressures are now starting to affect the South West of Ireland.

Consumer Issues

Northern Ireland Water Service became Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) on 1 April 2007. At the same time the Consumer Council became the representative for water and sewerage consumers.

Water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland

Water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland (NI) are delivered by NI Water.

The law sets down certain standards that NI Water must keep to. This covers issues such as water quality, treatment of waste water and new connections to the water or sewerage system. The economic, environmental and quality regulators make sure NI Water keeps to the rules that have been set out. The Consumer Council is the customer representative for water and sewerage services.

Currently there are no direct charges for water and sewerage services for domestic users in NI. The situation in NI differs from the remainder of the United

⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/world/2003/world_forum/water/default.stm#

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Kingdom where households pay a direct charge for the water and sewerage services they receive.

For years there was much contention that households in NI already paid for water and sewerage services through their regional rates bill. Following an independent review⁶ it was confirmed by the panel and accepted by the NI Executive that ratepayers paid an annual contribution towards Water Service through the regional rate.^{7 8} However, that contribution was not enough to cover the full cost of services. Presently, the majority of funding for NI Water comes from the NI Executive via the Department for Regional Development with the remainder being generated through non-domestic charging.

With a back drop of mounting pressures on public finance, strict requirements set out in European legislation and household budgets continuing to feel the effects of the recession the debate on the introduction of domestic water charges continues.

Ultimately, it is up to the NI Executive and NI Assembly to decide whether or not to introduce direct charging to households for these services.

Task: Consider why investment in the water and sewerage system is required.

Leakage

In 2010-2011 Northern Ireland Water's leakage rate was 177 million litres per day. As water is a precious resource we need to ensure that we use it efficiently and do not waste it.⁹

In recent years there has been work carried out to significantly reduce the amount of water lost through leakage. NI Water plans to continue to invest in work to find and repair leaks to carry on improving the levels of leakage.

Water efficiency

Water is a precious and finite resource. It has been calculated that it is 2 to 4 times cheaper to save water rather than to build a completely new water source.¹⁰

Other measures that could be considered to make more efficient use of water are:

⁶ In June 2007 the Regional Development Minister announced the terms of reference for an independent review into water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. The Review reported in October 2007 and January 2008.

⁷ Independent Water Review Panel, Strand One Report – Costs and Funding, October 2007

⁸ Minister for Regional Development, Ministerial Statement on review of water and sewerage services, NI Assembly, 22 October 2007

⁹ Northern Ireland Water Annual Report 2009-2010

¹⁰ [Robinson \(2002\), Water Resource Strategy 2002-2030](#)

- Provision of tax incentives (e.g. reduced VAT) on water efficient products or through a water efficiency scheme similar to the HeatSmart scheme available energy. This scheme provides free and independent heating advice for Housing Executive tenants. This would help promote more efficient use of water and could help reduce bills for those on lowest incomes.
- An education programme to encourage recycling of grey water (from baths/showers) to use in gardens or for washing cars.
- Establishment of a water efficiency index for domestic appliances in much the same way as for energy efficiency for appliances; since 1996 Finland's toilets have a 2 to 4 litre flush compared to the typical 9.5 litre flush in England.
- Make homes more water efficient by including more efficient toilets. These use significantly less water than traditional toilets. You can also purchase dual flush toilet which have two buttons. One of these is more a short flush and the other is for a longer flush. They are more efficient than traditional toilets also; even the long flush. Homes can be more water efficient by using more grey water in planning guidance or building control regulations. Grey water is used household water from baths and dishwashers etc.

Who to Contact / Further Information

Northern Ireland Water

<http://www.niwater.com> or telephone Waterline 08457 440088 or Leakline 0800 282 011

Consumer Council

<http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk> or telephone 0800 121 6022

Utility Regulator

<http://www.uregni.gov.uk> or telephone 028 9031 1575

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

<http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/> or telephone 0845 302 0008

Drinking Water Inspectorate

www.ni-environment.gov.uk/water-home or telephone 028 9056 9282

DRD Water Policy Division

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/water_policy.htm or telephone 028 9054 2985