

# Clean Water Facts



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

*When the poor and needy seek water, I will open rivers on the bare heights, And fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.*

- Isaiah 41:17-18

Water is life. Our bodies are largely made of water, as is much of the food we eat. Without water, we could not exist. Water is also a critical part of our spiritual life as Christians—it welcomes us into our life as Christians through baptism, and it forms a powerful metaphoric thread throughout the scriptures, symbolizing life, faith and the love of God.

Water scarcity is a growing problem around the world: if present withdrawal and consumption rates for water continue, two of every three people on Earth will live in water-stressed conditions by 2025. In the western United States, water scarcity has been an issue for many years. However, high rates of water consumption by agricultural and urban users threaten to deplete aquifers in areas of the country where supply has traditionally been plentiful, such as the upper Midwest.

In addition to our using more water than is returned in rain, we are also polluting the water we have. Most of the pesticides and fertilizers used in agriculture, sewer overflows, and the oil and grease from roads, eventually run off into the water systems. Other sources of excess nutrients include lawn fertilizers, pet and farm animal waste, decaying plant material, failing septic tanks, and inefficient sewage treatment plants. Industrial plants and municipal wastewater treatment plants can also contribute to the amount of toxic substances entering streams and rivers and ultimately lakes, estuaries, and coastal waters.

More than one billion people around the globe lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. In developing countries, 80 percent of illnesses relate to poor water quality: someone dies of a water-related illness every 14 seconds. In the United States we seldom worry about the quality of our drinking water, but forty percent of our rivers and lakes are too polluted to be safe for fishing and swimming. In early 2006, the Environmental Protection Agency released a study indicating that 42 percent of our nation's small streams are in "poor" condition.

The federal Clean Water Act was passed by Congress in 1972 to restore and maintain our nation's waters. The Clean Water Act has been instrumental in improving the health of rivers, lakes, and coastal waters. It has stopped billions of pounds of pollution from fouling the water, and dramatically increased the number of

waterways that are safe for swimming and fishing. The Safe Drinking Water Act was passed by Congress in 1974 to ensure the quality of our drinking water. It sets standards for drinking water quality and oversees the states, localities, and water suppliers who implement those standards. It also requires many actions to protect drinking water and its sources: rivers, lakes, reservoirs, springs, and ground water wells.