7 Water-Saving Strategies for Your Business

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Water is critical to sustaining our society, but we are pushing some resources to their limits.

In the US, the Colorado River, the primary water source for seven states, including California, is dipping dangerously low due to poor river management and a drought lasting more than two decades.

Lake Powell, a holding tank for outflow from the Colorado River, is perilously close to a "dead pool," where water levels get so low that water cannot flow downstream. If Lake Powel goes dry, the consequences will be immediate and sweeping, given that Colorado supports $1.4 trillion in economic output and 16 million jobs.

A dry Colorado River would affect drinking water, sanitation, agriculture, manufacturing, and even electricity, since Lake Powel provides power to more than 4.5 million people.

Related: 5 Ways Technology Can Help Save Water; Here's How!

Water scarcity does not just impact the US. From South Africa to Chile, countries worldwide have grappled with water shortages. Today 450 million children live in areas of high or extremely high water vulnerability.

But here's some encouraging news. Water scarcity doesn't have to be inevitable. As governments work to renegotiate better water management, businesses can take steps to avoid a true water crisis and prepare themselves for upcoming water

constraints.

1. Use behavioral change to conserve water

From washing hands to watering crops, all businesses use water. Non-manufacturing businesses may not see major daily water use, so encouraging employees to think more consciously about their water usage may be one of the most effective ways to conserve water.

The Queensland Business Bureau provides suggestions to help businesses such as:

- Create an employee led water savings initiative.
- Establish a company wide water use target.
- Appoint a ‘water champion’ to check and monitor progress.
- Provide information on ‘using water wisely.’ This can include education on how much water goes into products like paper (2 liters per sheet!).

Businesses can also learn lessons from the behavioral change campaigns Cape Town ran during its water crisis. In an effort to get all residents to use no more than 100 liters per person per day, Cape Town helped residents quantify water usage with online calculators and campaigns that illustrated different ways to measure one liter of water. Setting an actionable goal and teaching people how to measure that goal are key to success.

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2. Invest in technology to increase

water efficiency

Your first step to investing in water efficient technology may be surprisingly simple: routinely check for leaks and learn how to fix them. Real-time leakage detection systems can help to monitor pipes and faucets you do not regularly see, like the ones under your sink or behind your toilets. There are also apps to monitor your water usage through your utility. No matter the method, finding and preventing leaks can save gallons of water every day.

Installing a water fountain for employees that tracks how many water bottles are saved can reduce plastic usage. While we know single use plastic bottles create excess trash, plastic water bottles also contribute to water waste using 1.39 liters of water for every liter bottle produced.

3. Understand the impact across your supply chain

Given the importance of water as a resource, understanding how much different products contribute to your water footprint helps prevent a water crisis and saves money. The Water Footprint Calculator helps businesses and entrepreneurs better understand the water footprint of different products.

Water footprints have three parts. Green water footprints indicate the consumption of rainwater, blue water footprints indicate the consumption of surface and groundwater, and gray water footprints indicate the pollution of surface and groundwater. Understanding how much water different products use can help you choose products that rely on less water and are likely, cheaper.

Related: Role Of Startups In Creating Sustainable Water Solutions

4. Build a low-water use business

Some industries have exceptionally high water usage, including agriculture, apparel, beverages, biotechnology, and electric power. These industries also happen to be vital to modern existence. Disruptive businesses that find new alternatives to water intensive business models stand to thrive.

As water levels continue to fall, farmers will be particularly hard hit, given that agriculture accounts for 70% of the world's water usage. AI and other new technology can allow for "precision agriculture" that carefully monitors how much water plants need at any given moment. These technologies will be critical for the future of farming. Innovators should also look to sustainable fashion initiatives for potential business opportunities.

5. Support technologies that create more sustainable water systems

Where there is a problem, there is an opportunity to invent a solution. Technologies like Hawa Water tackle water scarcity in the UAE by harvesting drinking water straight from the air. Even governments are getting creative. Now that aquifers have been pumped dry, cities are turning to groundwater recharge projects and other man-made interventions to replenish them.

As the crisis grows, governments are providing money for startups with creative solutions. India, for example, has 18% of the world's population but only 4% of its water supply. The country's Clean Water For All challenge asks Indian entrepreneurs to pitch, pilot and scale solutions that help manage the subcontinent's water issues.

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6. Invest money in good water governance

Investing in companies that promote good water governance and don’t rely on outrageous amounts of water may be a better long-term bet. Not only will it contribute to safeguarding the world’s precious water supplies, but it will also ensure that soaring water prices don’t eventually destroy your investments overall. Groups like Fidelity have put together guides to investing in companies that take the future of water seriously.

7. The future of water is the future of business

Water impacts business in more ways than people might ever imagine. In addition to everything mentioned above, low water levels along the Mississippi recently resulted in a 3,000 barge backup that impacted how quickly people could get their goods.

As businesses think about adapting to an ever changing world, they must pay attention to the world of water as it does far more than keep us alive. Water generates electricity, prevents disease, grows food, produces goods, cools computers and keeps modern society moving forward.

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