

City residents, businesses found wasting extreme amounts of water

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By Li Zhixin

Beijingers flush a Kunming Lake of water down their toilets four times per year by flushing with tap rather than recycled water, according to recent research.

Two investigations into municipal water consumption released in advance of World Water Day this Monday found water waste in the capital is epidemic.

Of 100 residential compounds equipped with a water-reclaiming system, only 18 were actually using it. Residential compounds built before 2001 do not have a system for reclaiming waste water.

About 80 million to 100 million tons of tap water are flushed each year, according to the investigation.

“As far as I know, 90 percent of residents are not using recycled water,” said Peng Gong, an engineer at Beijing Heshengbeifang Development Company. “Many residents even bring in plumbers to disconnect from the system and hook their toilets into a tap feed,” he said.

“I usually use the sink to collect tap water and flush the toilet with it because the recycled water smells bad and runs black – it stains my toilet bowl,” said An Li, a resident of Dangdai Chenshi Jiayuan, a compound built in 2003.

Property management companies in many compounds blamed the problems on the municipal-supply system, which serves only 200 residential compounds in the city. Some compounds have their own water-recycling equipment, but the costs of operating it are very high.

“The water we collect is never enough to meet residential needs, so we end up having to switch over to tap water whenever we run out,” Zhang Bin, manager of a property company, said. In summer, when water consumption peaks, his building supplements its waste water reservoir with 700 to 800 tons of tap water.

Yu Yaping, spokesman for Beijing Water Authority (BWA), said factories, farms and municipal green work consume the most reclaimed water, which leaves little for residents. “Over 650 million tons of reclaimed water were used last year, but that still wasn’t enough for those organizations,” Yu said.

The usage of water in the bath industry is equally absurd: bath centers in Beijing consume 81 million tons of water per year – 41 times the volume of Kunming Lake, according to the “2010 China Environmental Green Paper” published last Friday by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Friends of Nature, an environmental NGO.

The Green Paper pointed out that the per capita water consumption in Beijing is 248 cubic meters, less than one-eighth of the national level and 5 percent of the world level.

The City Management Enforcement Bureau and BWA are planning to investigate sites with a high demand for water, including hotels, restaurants, public baths and construction sites. Those with no water-saving facilities may be fined up to 100,000 yuan.

The city is considering metered water prices, based on the amount of water used, for household consumers. The scheme is being discussed and a pilot project will begin before June.

As for recycled water usage, Yu said the authorities considered increasing its price last year but decided to keep it low in order to encourage more people to use it.

He said authorities will speed up the construction of more recycled water facilities, and will allocate 60 percent of the recycled water for urban landscaping, lakes and rivers and residential areas this year.