Home Use of Rainwater:
The Next Home-Based Environmental Movement?

by Bob Burgess, MCIP

Even without the reinforcement of personal experience, logic tells us that the collection, storage, and use of rainwater should be an important component of any community water conservation strategy. Our experience on Thetis Island, B.C., suggests that rainwater harvesting on a personal basis may actually be the best place to start building community commitment to this sphere of environmental stewardship.

Is it time to bring back the rain barrel? Given the fact that garden watering can account for up to half of total summer domestic water demand, what better place to start? As we learned with the recycling movement, the initial impetus is most likely to come from the grassroots of public conscious-ness and concern. The burgeoning number of gardeners gives us a core group to mobilize. Are planners and local decision-makers going to get on board?

This form of stewardship creates four key public benefits, namely:

- enhancement of the natural environment, from the backyard to local streams and lakes;
- reductions in the costs of public utilities (through favourable impacts on future water supply and stormwater infrastruc-ture, and on sewage treatment volumes);
- the empowerment of citizens; and
- a readily accessible source of water in case of earthquakes.

Please visit the "Conference Proceedings" section of the new CIP Web site for a complete version of this presentation, with examples of regulations and incentives that municipalities may wish to consider when developing their own strategic plan for rainwater use.

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