



Fact Sheet

H2O Today Water by the Numbers

- Water covers about 71 percent of the Earth's surface, and the oceans hold about 97 percent of that water.
- Less than 3 percent of the water on Earth is drinkable. Of that fresh water, almost 69 percent is in icecaps and glaciers.
- 35 percent of the water that people use worldwide comes from aquifers.
- 44 percent of the world's population lives within 93 miles (150 kilometers) of the sea.
- 8 percent of the world's population, or 540 million people, are supported by the fishing industry.
- 95 percent of the world's freight travels by ship.
- St. Lawrence River Basin—one of the largest freshwater systems in the world, covering nearly a million square miles—drains more than one-quarter of Earth's freshwater reserves and is home to around 15 million Canadians.
- The Amazon is 4,195 miles long, and its river basin is the largest in the world covering about 2,720,000 square miles, including its 15,000 tributaries and sub-tributaries.
- Worldwide, on average 70 percent of water used goes to agriculture with 20 percent used in industry and 10 percent domestically.
- Americans consume an average of 151 gallons (573 liters) per person per day for domestic and municipal purposes. In contrast, people in the United Kingdom, like most Europeans, use about 31 gallons (118 liters) per person per day.
- In many African countries, only one in four people have access to clean water that's piped indoors, and water use is still lower. Ethiopians, for example, use on average 3 gallons (10 liters) per person per day.
- Geologists estimate that Earth's rivers deliver about 12 billion tons of sediment to the sea each year.
- Once the world's fourth-largest body of fresh water, the Aral Sea lies between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia. Between 1973 and 2004, the sea lost 75 percent of its volume and more than half its surface area as a result of water being extracted for cotton farming.
- An estimated 8 million metric tons of plastic trash enter the sea from land every year. This is the equivalent of five plastic bags filled with trash for every foot of coastline around the world.
- It takes about 1,799 gallons of water to produce 1 pound of beef.
- The production of a pair of jeans uses about 2,000 gallons of water.
- Approximately 18 gallons of water goes into the production of a single apple.

H2O Today examines the diversity and challenges of global water sources and promotes conversation, creativity and innovation through art, science and technology. The exhibition is organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. It was adapted from an exhibition organized by the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (www.amnh.org).

