

GUIDE TO WATER USAGE AND CONSERVATION

Climate Action Programme 2024

Water Factsheet

2024





WHY WE SHOULD SAVE WATER

- Water is a precious and finite resource, and the way we use it is increasingly coming under the spotlight. As weather patterns alter and the world population continues to grow, access to water, particularly clean water, is a global issue. This is the case even in countries with significant rainfall such as Ireland. As demand increases and the impact of climate change ramps up, decreased rainfall and droughts at certain times of the year will lead to water shortages which will impact businesses, including those in the arts sector. Respecting the precious nature of water as a resource is a good starting point. If we care about water, we'll care about how much we use it, and what we put into it.
- Water is also a cost to businesses – by conserving water, arts organisations can save money.
- Energy is used in the collecting, cleaning and distribution of water. This means that there are GHG (Green House Gas) emissions associated with water use and these contribute to the overall emissions for arts organisations. This is even the case with harvested grey water though emissions are lower. Conserving water (using less) means generating less GHG emissions.
- In addition to conserving potable water usage, we need to be mindful of wastewater – water used to remove substances we don't want – sewage, dirt from dishes and clothes, and all of the chemicals we use to clean ourselves, our homes, our cars, and our businesses. All of these pollutants enter the water ecosystem.
- Embedding water conservation in your organisation signals to your audiences and other stakeholders your desire to be environmentally sustainable . This has a reputational benefit.

WHERE TO START



MEASURING YOUR WATER USE

Large Buildings or those with dedicated water meters and bills can begin by measuring their water usage. Water bills are issued quarterly from Uisce Éireann. Water bills will list the amount of water you have used and the amount of wastewater you have discharged. These quantities are measured in cubic meters. Standing charges will be noted and, possibly, deductions for a water allowance.

Keep a record of your usage on a spreadsheet, noting any unusual patterns. A sudden increase in water usage might indicate that there is a leak in the system. Establish your baseline water usage and identify ways in which you can reduce this over time.

If you don't have a water meter, but still receive water bills, these will be estimated based on the kind of business you're operating.

If your organisation is based in a shared building, you will not receive water bills nor be in a position to measure your water usage. Nonetheless, many of the water conservation measures listed below will still apply. Not having a water bill, or having only estimated bills will mean that you can't calculate any reductions in water usage – but don't let that deter you from conserving water!



WATER AUDIT

Where you are based in a large building, consider doing an audit of your water usage. Walk through your building, identifying where water is being used. In the case of theatres and arts centres, consider usage in the bar or café, in the dressing rooms, backstage, in the kitchen or green room, in the toilets – maybe you have a laundry room? Galleries and Studios will also use water in workshop and wet workshop spaces, Print Workshops will be especially mindful of how acids and chemicals are disposed of to avoid water contamination.



WATER CONSERVATION

Whether you are based in a large building or an office or smaller building, you will find relevant suggestions on conserving water below:

- Conduct a water audit to see where savings can be made (as outlined above)
- Don't leave taps running, a running tap can waste up to six litres of water per minute.
- Keep a jug of cooled water in the fridge for drinking water, rather than running the tap till the water runs cold.
- Keep a small basin in your sink and use this to wash cups etc rather than running the tap constantly. Water not contaminated by washing-up-liquid can be repurposed to water indoor plants.
- Detect leaks and fix dripping taps or leaking toilets.
- Where new taps are being installed, use mixer taps as they waste less water.
- Invest in water efficient devices and appliances such as dual flush toilets, sensors in urinals, mixer taps and low flow showers.
- Conserve up to one litre of water per flush in old cisterns with a non-permeable brick, bottle of water or water toilet reduction device, such as a hippo bag.
- When replacing dishwashers or washing machines, choose those which are the most energy efficient and use the least amount of water. Only run these when there is a full load. This will also conserve electricity.
- Where you have outdoor planting areas or plant pots, consider installing a water butt to harvest water for plants and shrubs.
- Appoint water stewards who will champion water conservation within your organisation. Encourage water stewards to undertake the online training available on the Uisce Eireann website.
- Use benchmarks to compare with others in the arts sector to help identify water that is wasted through leaks or excessive usage.*

*Some of the above has been adapted from the Uisce Eireann guide to Water Conservation for Businesses.



OTHER OPTIONS TO REDUCE WATER USE

- Check for Leaks:** Where water usage is high, do a night time test to check for leaks – read your water meter prior to closing the building for the day, ensuring that all water using appliances including urinals are turned off. Take another reading when opening up the following morning and note the usage. If water consumption is unexpected, you may have a leak. This should be investigated.
- Go waterless:** Waterless processes can dramatically reduce your use. This can include air-vacuums, high-pressure air jets, and dry sweeping.
- Low maintenance plants:** Choose plants that need less water (cacti, peace lilies, aloe vera and jade plants). Water outdoor plants in the morning before the sun gets too hot.
- Harvest rainwater:** A harvesting system allows you to collect rainwater. You can then install systems to use rainwater in your toilets, dishwashers, and showers. A simple water butt can collect rainwater to water plants, or wash windows.
- Grey water system:** Used water is known as grey water. It's made up of wastewater from sinks, shower drains or washing machines. Grey water systems collect and reuse this wastewater. You can then use it to flush toilets, water plants, and wash external areas of the building.



WASTE WATER

A critical issue in terms of water usage is the way in which we use water to remove unwanted substances such as dirt, sewage etc. We also use strong chemicals to 'clean' kitchens, toilets and showers. These chemicals all make their way into our water systems. Conduct an audit of all cleaning chemicals in your building or work spaces that are currently ending up in waste water discharge. Identify more sustainable alternatives.

Keep your drains clean: You should also look at what else is being poured down your drains. The build-up of fats, oils and grease (FOG) can cause serious blockages. Learn more about preventing FOG blockages.

Clean Coasts (An Taisce) and Uisce Éireann run an environmental awareness campaign, Think Before You Flush. Only 'Pee, Poo and Paper' should be flushed down the toilet. You can access excellent signage from their website for use in your building by [clicking this link](#).

Similarly, both organisations have teamed up to create the Think Before You Pour campaign which highlights the problems caused by pouring fats, oils and greases down the sink.



CHANGE HOW YOU THINK



WORKING WITH OTHERS

Make colleagues aware of the scarcity of water and the benefits of conservation. Put up signs in staff kitchens or toilets that remind people to turn off taps or use low flush options.

Raise awareness amongst customers and employees with water conservation notices and signage near sinks and showers. Be sure to involve all those involved in cleaning and maintaining your buildings or offices.

Instigate a water conservation awareness week with your colleagues and other building users.



BE MINDFUL

Try to limit how often you wash building exteriors or clean windows. Limit the use of power washers as they use large amounts of water.

Encourage staff to report dripping taps or other broken appliances.

Encourage your staff to drink tap water – provide safe drinking water

RESOURCES

- [Uisce Éireann \(formerly Irish Water\)](#)
- [Uisce Éireann's Water Conservation Pledge](#)
- [Uisce Éireann Water Stewardship training courses](#)
- [An Taisce's 'Think Before You Flush'](#)
- [An Taisce's 'Think Before You Pour'](#)
- [Creative Carbon Scotland guide to water management](#)
- [Julie's Bicycle guide to water management in buildings](#)
- [Julie's Bicycle guide to water management for outdoor events](#)

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for joining us in climate action.

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