

We must take steps to conserve water supply

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This cold drenching of a winter has made the drought of last summer seem comfortably distant.

But it was just mere months ago that a prolonged dry spell caused voluntary and mandatory conservation efforts by area cities. It also resulted in Dow Chemical Co. having to purchase water from the Brazos River Authority, which the Brazos Water Authority, provider of drinking water to nine area cities, had to help pay for.

Like residents stocking away emergency provisions, area officials are keeping memories of the drought fresh and as close at hand as bottled water, with Brazoria County commissioners conducting a workshop last week to prime the pump of water planning.

"While it appears we have plenty of water, sometimes more than we want, we have all seen what can happen with a lack of rainwater," Pct. 4 Commissioner Mary Ruth Rhodenbaugh said.

The workshop floated topics such as a desalination plant, water conservation laws and creating a group to concentrate on the county's water needs. Other suggestions included improved metering, raising rates for spikes in usage and increased use of low-flow toilets and showers.

Brandt Mannchen of the Sierra Club's Houston chapter said small changes in area homes could save thousands of gallons of water.

There are some things we can do without. Water is simply not one of them. The unpredictability of climate, combined with growing population and demand, make it imperative we act now to find ways to conserve water and ensure sources of life's most basic ingredient.

Roughly two-thirds of the human body consists of water. According to survivaltopics.com, a person who loses 2.5 percent of body weight from dehydration loses 25 percent of efficiency. That's about 2 quarts of water for a person who weighs 175 pounds.

And according to howstuffworks.com, a person in reasonable shape and in the most ideal conditions "can probably live for about 3 to 5 days without any water" — luckier ones slightly longer.

But it goes beyond just gulping down one of those eight or so glasses of water recommended for each day. Ready availability of water also is crucial for agriculture, industry and recreation.

We no longer can take for granted we'll always have plenty of water. Or that we won't encounter other related problems, such as how overpumping of groundwater in the northern end of the county has led to land subsidence.

Any fixes will be expensive, and dramatic conservation steps could be difficult to implement. But as Buddy Baker of the Brazosport Business Roundtable said in backing the building of a desalination plant, "I know it's expensive, but I would rather have expensive water than no water."

The commissioners' workshop is a good first step toward taking the plunge to action, and it's an issue that affects every single Brazoria County resident. Now's the time to learn what each of us can do to preserve this precious resource.

Today's editorial was written by Glenn Krampota, features editor for The Facts.