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Winthrop's Office of Sustainability Says Students Can Help with Water Conservation South Carolina's Drought Is Not Water under the Bridge Yet By Katie Cantrell

This past summer, less-than-average rainfall combined with high temperatures caused the water level of several bodies of water in South Carolina to drop. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) declared a state of drought to raise awareness in the counties most affected.

"Low streamflows have caused small, but steady, declines in most of the state's major reservoirs, and most...are currently below their target levels," says Scott Harder of the SCDNR. Even Lake Wylie, the lake from which Rock Hill and the surrounding area receives its water, suffered a major impact from the drought. On September 16, Duke Energy closed all boat ramps at Buster Boyd, Allison Creek and South Point. Within a week, Lake Wylie's water level declined four inches, reducing it to six feet below full elevation.

Because South Carolina has declared a state of drought in eight of the past ten years, its residents need to reconsider some practices related to water use during these drought periods. At Winthrop, students can do their part to help conserve water. Whether or not the state is experiencing a drought, water conservation is necessary to ensure that there will be sufficient water resources for the future.



This Lake Wylie access point, located across from the Buster Boyd Bridge, is one of many that Duke Energy closed due to low water levels.

The university has set an example for its students by applying water conservation strategies to new construction and renovations on campus. Examples include installing hands-free faucets and flush valves, saving 400,000 gallons of water annually, as well as adding cisterns to the President's house to collect rainwater.

Here are five simple ways students can engage in water conservation on campus.

1. Keep a container of drinking water in your refrigerator.

In both the dorm and apartment, individuals wanting water from the tap typically let the faucet run until the water is cool. According to an article by Eartheasy, a website that offers information and products for sustainable living, an individual can save up to 50 percent of water used for personal drinking by keeping a pitcher in the refrigerator. Besides the obvious benefit of conserving water, this method makes the water cooler than it would be from the faucet, and it also discourages purchasing single plastic bottles that might not be recycled properly.

2. Notify maintenance workers of leaks.

According to an article by a non-profit environmental group, Heal the Bay, the best way to determine if you have a leak is to turn off all taps and see if the water meter dials still move. If they do, there is a leak coming from one of your water fixtures. Many leaks can be a result of old fixtures or pipes that have started to corrode. If you find a leak, contact someone who can fix it as soon as possible.

3. Use rainwater catchments.

Catchments are containers used for collecting rainwater. Often droughts are followed by flooding. When it does rain during a drought period, these catchments will collect the water in order for it to be used, when it would otherwise dissipate into the ground. Stores like Lowe's and Sam's Club sell rainwater catchments.

4. Take shorter showers.

One of the most common ways students use too much water is by taking lengthy showers. The recommended shower length is five to seven minutes. By reducing your time in the shower, the Delaware River Basin Commission says you can save three to five gallons of water each minute.

5. Make sure the dishwasher is full before turning it on.

Dishwashers use between eight and ten gallons per load, which is actually less than if you were to wash the same load by hand. You can further save water by scraping or wiping excess food off of dishes instead of rinsing them in the sink before loading.

At Winthrop University, the Office of Sustainability encourages students to practice water conservation efforts such as these. For additional information on Winthrop's conservation efforts or what you can do to save water, visit www.winthrop.edu/sustainability.



Storing drinking water in a container such as this one saves water that would otherwise be wasted down the drain while waiting on it to get cool.