

Water levels at an all-time low

From Our Environment Correspondent

The water companies have been given just three weeks to come up with plans to explain how they will respond to the current water shortage and to the long-term need to provide water for homes whilst, at the same time, protecting our rivers.

Leakage is the top priority. At present an average of 30% of treated water leaks away before it can be used. Among the plans being considered is for the water companies to offer to repair leaks on customers' land free of charge.

Another way of saving water is for every home to use water more carefully. A way of encouraging this would be to introduce water meters in every household. 'If people knew they had to pay for every drop of water they use,' said one water company spokesman yesterday, 'they would jolly soon be far more conservation minded!'

But the government is reserving its position on water meters. Apart from the extra cost of installing the meters, they wonder about the fairness for people with large families, or those with medical conditions requiring frequent bathing, or those whose work makes them dirty.

As a third of domestic water currently goes down the toilet, reducing this could alone make a major impact on the immediate problem.



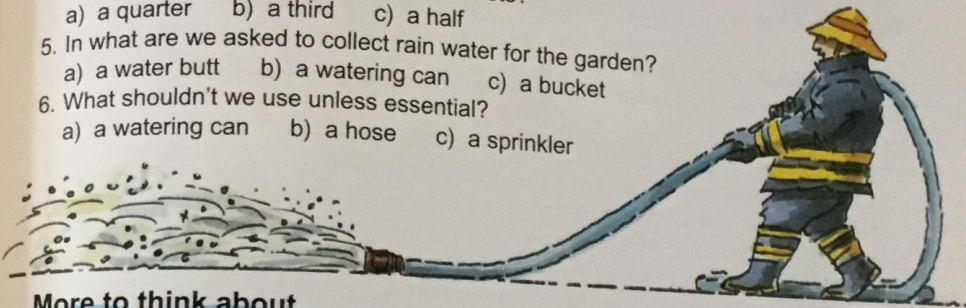
A recently produced Environment Agency leaflet gives some water saving tips:

- The toilet. Placing a water-filled bottle in the cistern will help by stopping the cistern from taking in so much water as it refills.
- Showers use much less water than baths.
- Don't use washing machines or dishwashers with half loads.
- Be a water pest! Snoop for dripping taps and get them fixed.
- Use washing-up water in the garden to water the flowers and vegetables, rather than fresh water.
- Use a water butt to collect rain water for the garden.
- Turn off the tap while you are brushing your teeth.
- Don't use sprinklers unless essential.

Do you remember?

Choose the right answer for each question. Write the answers in your book.

1. How long have the water companies been given to prepare their plans?
a) one week b) three weeks c) three months
2. What is to be their top priority?
a) river pollution b) weather forecasting c) stopping leakages
3. Why might water meters be introduced?
a) to make more money for the companies
b) to encourage people to use less water
c) to stop people washing so much
4. How much domestic water is used in toilets?
a) a quarter b) a third c) a half
5. In what are we asked to collect rain water for the garden?
a) a water butt b) a watering can c) a bucket
6. What shouldn't we use unless essential?
a) a watering can b) a hose c) a sprinkler



More to think about

1. Pretend you are the reporter who wrote this article. Your editor has said it is far too long, and you must rewrite it to about half its present length. This means you can use approximately 150 words, but you mustn't leave out any essential information!
2. Write a sentence to answer each of these questions.
a) Who has asked the water companies to prepare plans?
b) Why have they been asked to act urgently?
c) Why might it help if they offer to repair leaks on customers' land without charging?
d) Why are water meters unfair to families with several children?
3. Make lists of the ways you could save water:
a) at school b) at home.

Now try these

1. Prepare a design for a poster that is intended to promote **one** of the water saving tips.
2. We live in a country that usually has plenty of rainfall. Do you think we should be able to use as much water as we want whenever we want, or should we be 'more conservation minded'? Give reasons for your answer.