

[Want to conserve water? Fix your leaky pipes now](#)

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Reporter's

blog

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Here's a sobering assessment as you fill the coffee maker and hear the sprinklers pop on in the backyard: One-quarter of the world's population lives in conditions characterized in a new study as water-scarce.

And if you're reading this in Arizona, you're among that group.

The study, by the International Water Management Institute, was released last month as part of World Water Week events in Stockholm. Researchers were actually looking at the connection between water and food production, but their findings about the world's water supply grabbed bigger headlines.

What's interesting about the report is its nuance. Researchers didn't just stick a figurative dipstick in the global water tank and report the numbers. Access to water challenges people for a slew of reasons, only some of which are related to dry rivers and empty aquifers.

In some areas, there is plenty of water, but not enough money or other resources to get the water to where people can use it. The report classifies those situations as economic scarcity. In other areas, the demand is truly outstripping the supply, which the report calls physical scarcity.

A third category should alarm people just as much, if not more, the researchers say. Artificial scarcity occurs when water supplies are overcommitted to certain users, such as agriculture or cities, and while there appears to be abundant water, by the time the canals and pumps have taken their turn, there's not enough left to serve all needs and still preserve natural habitat.

The report includes a map of water-scarce areas. If you look it up online, note how the at-risk areas are heavily concentrated, with much of Africa in economic scarcity, and how a bright red blotch of physical scarcity covers the American Southwest.

A Mexico City-based researcher offered a slightly different take on world water shortages at another session in Stockholm. Asit Bitwas, head of the Third World Centre for Water Management, said there's plenty of water to go around if the world's biggest cities would just fix their leaky pipes.

Seriously.

Bitwas, in a story by Reuters, said as much as 40 to 60 percent of water never reaches the consumer in the biggest urban areas because of leaks and shoddy maintenance.

"It is cheaper to fix your leaks, improve your maintenance systems, which you can do in a couple of years, rather than build a dam 200 kilometers away," he told the news service.

That comes as no surprise to most water-system managers in the United States. Fixing leaks, in fact, is a key component of water conservation campaigns here in Phoenix and Tucson. Leaks accounted for 14 percent of a household's annual water use in one study at Colorado State University. Fixing leaks can save 140 gallons a week, according to the study.

So that faucet you heard dripping last night? Go fix it with the knowledge you're helping the planet.

Websource: <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0908b3blog0908.html>