

## **Bleak future for global water supplies.**

**Two new reports, one from the WWF and the other from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) forecast a bleak future for global water supplies.**

The WWF's report, an analysis of access to fresh water, warns of a 'major and mounting' water crisis for the world's richer nations as well as the poorest.

It notes the recurring droughts along Europe's Atlantic front, and says that 'it is now apparent that intensive pollution remediation in Europe's heartland will not be able to salvage some contaminated water sources – while the much worse contamination issues of Eastern Europe are yet to be substantially addressed.'

In the US, the report warns that large areas are using 'substantially' more water than can be naturally replenished, which will be exacerbated by climate change. Salinity threatens important irrigation, and there is increasing anxiety over chemical and pathogen contamination. 'The main mechanisms for controlling pollution are themselves under threat,' it adds.

In Australia, nearly all the major cities have water restrictions and salinity is a major threat here, too. Japan has high rainfall but high population and 'surprisingly' low levels of water per capita. Cities can suffer both water shortages and damaging floods. Contamination of supplies, including groundwater, is an extremely serious issue.

Common problems in the developed world include looming exhaustion of supplies, water-related conflicts, contamination, degraded landscape functioning, and economic issues such as leakage.

There is an acceptance in the developed world that water must be used efficiently, the report concludes, and countries have the choice of trying to match use with their natural water realities.

Key challenges include proper valuation of water, agreeing on the balance between conservation and consumption, changing attitudes to water, modifying or repairing ageing or inappropriate infrastructure, bringing agriculture into line with expectations and prices for other users, reducing contamination and building knowledge of natural water cycles and processes.

The report deals with issues in detail by continent, and is available at [www.wwf.org](http://www.wwf.org).

The WBCSD report, based on a two and a half-year study by influential member companies including Suez, Shell, Coca Cola and Severn Trent, looks at a number of possible water-related scenarios, starting around 2010 and moving forward in time.

Looking at businesses' role in working towards solutions, the report provides an in-depth examination of the issues based around three scenarios, termed H, 2 and O, each examining different possible futures.

H stands for hydro, or water efficiency, 2 for the two sides to water disputes, often on opposite banks of a river, and O for ocean, or interconnectivity and taking the whole system into account.

The H scenario paints a picture of general water resource problems and irreversible salinity in China's North Plain; 2 postulates increasingly acrimonious disputes among 'water haves' and 'have nots'; and the O scenario predicts major waterborne crypto and MRSA outbreaks in a city on the US East Coast and cholera in London.

Detailed solutions are offered within all of the scenarios, in the form of enlightened business practices teamed with a greater understanding among government bodies and other stakeholders of the issues and the best approaches to take.

The report is available from [www.wbcasd.org](http://www.wbcasd.org).

Lis Stedman