

Gibsons offers a lesson in conservation by charging for water

BY DAN FUMANO, THE PROVINCE SEPTEMBER 19, 2013

- [STORY](#)

- [PHOTOS \(1 \)](#)



Dave Newman is head of engineering for Gibsons. The town has been recognized internationally for its water.

Photograph by: Linda Sabiston , For The Province

The residents of Gibsons should be proud of their water. It comes up out of the ground pure and untreated and was awarded “Best Drinking Water in the World” in the world’s largest water tasting competition.

But it’s not free.

Last year, Gibsons began charging 20 cents a litre for water from the outdoor tap at Well No. 1, which for years had provided its award-winning water for free to both residents and tourists.

The decision to charge, while controversial among residents not accustomed to paying at the pump, was part of a broader shift in Gibsons' water strategy, which has drawn recognition from experts as a successful example of a modern, progressive water management plan.

The broader plan includes a universal metering program for every residence and business in Gibsons. About 75 per cent of the town's 4,500 residents rely on a groundwater source, while Upper Gibsons is supplied from the Sunshine Coast Regional District's treated surface water source.

As a result, since 2009 water consumption in Gibsons has dropped overall by 36 per cent — despite the town's continued population growth.

Dave Newman, the head of engineering for Gibsons, said metering is one of a number of initiatives in recent years that contributed to the "impressive drop in water consumption." In addition to the metering, Gibsons replaced some water mains, made changes to distribution plans and repaired a number of leaks.

The metering system has resulted in an added bonus. Metering provides more information about water flow, which allows the municipality to identify and repair leaks where water was previously wasted.

Newman said the metering also provides a more fair billing system, and allows residents to save money if they cut back on water use.

"If someone decides they're going to have a big, green lawn and they're going to refill their pool three times a year, then they will be paying for that. Versus a little old lady who chooses to let her grass go brown. They're paying for what they're using, rather than everybody paying the same amount."

The universal water metering and cross connection control program was installed over three years at a cost of \$1.5 million, which was partially funded by a \$460,000 provincial grant.

The Gibsons department of finance was responsible for setting the 20 cents a litre charge rate at Well No. 1.

After charges were introduced, Well No. 1 saw a big decrease in consumption. In 2011, the year before they started charging, the monthly average was 50,800 litres. For 2013 so far, it's down more than 80 per cent to 8,750 litres a month. With the 20 cents charged per litre, that brings the town about \$1,700 a month.

Ian Poole, director of finance, said that over the first two years of metered billing, the vast majority of residents saw their bills decrease from the years of the flat rate. Last year, they increased rates to make up for a deficit, and over the coming years, town hall will continue to tinker with the rates to find the correct amount needed to cover the cost of the infrastructure, operations and maintenance,

Poole said it makes sense to charge for water, “because it makes people aware of the precious resource that it is.”

Gibsons has received outside recognition for their progressive water stewardship strategy. The town was selected as a case study at an international conference at the University of Toronto’s Monk School of Global Affairs. Along with examples from the United States and Europe, the Gibsons was highlighted in the Program on Water Innovation conference in June.

dfumano@theprovince.com

twitter.com/fumano

© Copyright (c) The Province

- [E-mail this Article](#)
- [Print this Article](#)
- [Share this Article](#)

MORE ON THIS STORY

- [B.C. groundwater campaign gathers momentum with online petition](#)
- [World watching how B.C. wrestles with how to protect drinking water](#)
- [104-year-old act governing B.C.'s water supply will be updated, vows environment minister](#)
- [Anmore issues boil water notice](#)
- [Contaminated soil plan could threaten drinking water for Vancouver Island community](#)

STORY TOOLS

- [E-mail this Article](#)
- [Print this Article](#)

Font: