



## Why Less Water?

### Why is water conservation and protection important?

Water quality and availability are both essential to protecting patient and worker health and critical to daily hospital operations. The World Economic Forum's 2016 [Global Risk Report](#) states, "... the failure of climate change mitigation and adaptation has risen to the top and is perceived in 2016 as the most impactful risk for the years to come, ahead of weapons of mass destruction, ranking 2nd, and water crises, ranking 3rd."

Hospitals are the most water intensive facilities in the country with seven percent of all commercial and institutional use (EPA, 2014). For every square foot, a hospital uses almost 42.9 gallons of water per year or 282 gallons per adjusted patient day. Circle of Excellence in Water winners use a median 29.31 gallons per sq.ft. per year. (Practice Greenhealth, 2015).

Health care facilities are often not only the largest consumer of water in a community but also can potentially be inadvertent water polluters through poor control of pharmaceutical and hazardous materials. Pollution prevention activities include chemical, pharmaceutical, waste stream management, integrated pest management and healthy landscape care. Without adequate storm water protection, health care facilities contribute to runoff of pollutants during rain or snow events.

By 2030, studies show global water supplies will meet just 60 percent of total demand affecting the ability to meet population needs. To ensure water isn't a scarce resource for future generations, conservation will be a key component in human behavior.

**Cost:** Practice Greenhealth award winning hospitals and clinics are collectively saving \$1,938,432 annually through water conservation efforts. They saved more

than 145 million gallons of water in 2014 ( Source 2015 Practice Greenhealth Sustainability Benchmark Report).

**Climate change:** Extreme drought in the Southwestern U.S. is connected to climate change as well as historically poor stewardship of the resource. There is currently a negative feedback loop with water drilling and a decreased water table. In January 2014, Gov. Jerry Brown (D) [declared](#) a state of emergency over the drought and directed state agencies to take steps to prepare for water shortfalls. The **California State Water Resources Control Board** [adopted](#) emergency regulations calling for a 25 percent decrease in overall urban water use across the state. Currently hospitals are exempted from this regulation while most are working to improve water conservation and California health systems are leading the way by setting system water conservation goals.

Water is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions because of the energy consumption related to distribution and treatment.

**Food Scarcity:** Water shortages in the Southwestern part of the United States could be connected to food price increases or shortages. A hamburger patty takes about 450 gallons of water to produce. It is important to consider water footprint for common goods used in hospitals such as meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetable, cotton and coffee.

**Disaster preparedness:** Health care organizations must have a supply of safe drinking water to maintain operations during natural or manmade disasters. The United Nations published [Climate Change Adaptation: The Pivotal Role of Water](#) to better help understand the link between ecosystem and well-being of societies.