SAVING WATER IN YOUR OFFICES

A practical guide on how humanitarian and development organisations can **protect the environment and reduce expenditures** by using water efficiently

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WELCOME

This practical guide was designed for humanitarian and development organisations who want to reduce the environmental impact of their operations, such as running their offices, and managing logistics and procurement. It aims to support them in adopting practical measures that help with reducing the amount of water they use in their offices. Saving water **reduces organisations' costs** and **contributes to environmental sustainability**. Many organisations operate in areas where water scarcity is a serious issue, and it should be their responsibility to use this precious resource efficiently.

This document will **help you understand**:

- Which water-saving measures can you adopt?
- How much time and money do they require?
- How can you implement them?
- What should you be careful about?

The guidance encourages organisations to choose the measures that are most realistic and effective in their context. It is part of a larger **package of resources designed to help organisations operate in a more eco-friendly manner**. Other resources in this package include a step-by-step guide on how to introduce various environmental measures in your organisation, an easy-to-use planning and reporting tool, practical checklists and guidance on additional topics, such as ensuring more eco-friendly transport, saving energy, waste reduction, making procurement more sustainable, and organising events in an eco-friendly manner. You can access these additional resources through this website.

The guide is offered through the Civil Society Now platform that supports civil society organisations in developing their capacities. It was prepared in 2024 by People in Need as part of its efforts to **increase the environmental sustainability of humanitarian and development operations**. If you have any questions or suggestions on how to improve the guidance, please contact petr.schmied@peopleinneed.net.

WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT SAVING WATER?

- Saving water is **essential for both environmental sustainability and cost efficiency**. By reducing water use, we can preserve vital water resources, lower our costs, and minimise our environmental footprint.

- You can save water in **two main ways**:
  - **Directly:** By introducing measures that reduce the amount of water used in your offices.
  - **Indirectly:** The production of many goods requires much more water than we might imagine. For example, 12,760 litres of water are required to produce a smartphone, 2,550 litres to make one ream of paper, and 1,753 litres is required per serving of beef (source). That is a lot, often much more than organisations can save through water saving measures they introduce. Therefore, the most effective way to save water is to ensure that your organisation avoids any unnecessary purchases.

HOW CAN YOU SAVE WATER?

There are many different actions your organisation can take to use water more efficiently. This guide helps you **focus on several most feasible and impactful measures**:

- 🕓 Discuss and agree with your colleagues on what measures you can take to save water in your offices.
- $ 🕓 Install aerators to taps in all bathrooms to reduce water flow.
- $ 🕓 If you use flush toilets, install low-cost water-saving systems.
- $ 🕓 Inspect the water systems at your premises for leaks and address them immediately.
- $ 🕓 Consider installing sensor taps.
- 🕓 Review how much water is used for cleaning offices and washing vehicles and ensure that it is used more efficiently, if needed.
- 🕓 If your office has a garden, ensure it is watered early in the morning only.
- $$ 🕓🕓 If relevant, consider installing and using a rainwater harvesting system.

Your colleagues are likely to have good ideas about how to implement the recommended measures effectively and may also suggest other measures. **Involve them in the discussion of the planned water-saving measures** so that they are actively engaged in their development and support their implementation.

TIME 🕓 AND MONEY $

For each recommended measure, the symbols of money ($) and time (🕓) indicate how demanding it is to implement the measure. The more symbols of $ / 🕓 there are, the more initial funding / time investment is required. If the $ symbol is not shown, it means that the measure does not cost (almost) anything to implement.

RECOMMENDED WATER-SAVING MEASURES

Several key measures can ensure that your organisation uses considerably less water. Most of them are affordable and easy-to-implement so **aim to introduce them in all your offices**.

🕓 Discuss and agree with your colleagues on what measures you can take to save water in your offices

Why: You and your colleagues are best positioned to find feasible ways to save water in your offices, as you should know where most water is wasted and what measures are feasible. Engaging colleagues in finding solutions is also crucial for ensuring their support of any newly introduced measures.

How: Organise a meeting with your colleagues, especially those responsible for maintaining offices, gardens (if available), and vehicles. Ensure that the person(s) who clean the office is also present. Explain why you want to use water more efficiently and ask for suggestions on how this could be achieved. If any of the measures listed in this guidance were not mentioned, explain them and seek feedback on how they should be implemented. Conclude the meeting with a list of the planned water-saving measures and an agreement on when they will be implemented and who is responsible.

$ 🕓 Install aerators to taps in all bathrooms to reduce water flow

Why: Tap aerators are simple screens that screw onto the faucet head and reduce the water flow by 50 - 80 percent without sacrificing water pressure, making them a simple and effective solution to saving water. See the second photo for the difference in the water flow with and without the aerator.

How: Aerator is an inexpensive (a few USD) device that can be screwed onto the tap. Aerator sellers can help you choose the right type and you can find many videos on YouTube on how to install them (it takes only a few minutes). Three things to keep in mind:

- *Aerators vary in effectiveness:* While some save only 20% of the water, others save 80%. It is recommended to purchase aerators that allow you to adjust how much water flows so that you can adjust it to your preferences (try the most efficient one first; it is recommended to use aerators that reduce water flow by at least 60%).
- *Size and type of the aerator:* To know which aerator you should buy, you need to know the diameter of the tap (you can measure it) and whether it has threads on the outside or inside.

RECOMMENDED WATER-SAVING MEASURES

- *Some taps come with aerators installed:* In such a case, you should check first how effective the aerator is. While efficient aerators ensure a flow of 2 – 4 litres per minute, inefficient ones have a flow of 10 - 15 litres per minute. Test your aerator efficiency by letting the water run to the maximum and measuring how much water flows in a minute. If more than 6 litres flow, it is worth replacing the aerator with a more efficient one.

Efficient aerators are less suitable in places where a faster flow of water is needed, e.g. when cleaners need to fill water buckets or where people fill glasses.

$ 🕓 If you use flush toilets, install low-cost water-saving systems

Why: Toilet water savers are simple mechanical devices that reduce water flow by 30 – 50%, saving hundreds of cubic meters of water per office.

How: There are multiple ways to reduce the flow of your toilet while ensuring that it flushes well:

- The simplest method is to put a few centimetres of sand or pebbles in the bottom of a one-litre bottle to weigh it down. Then, fill the rest of the bottle with water, close the lid, and put in the cistern safely away from the operating mechanism (see photo). Another method is to hang a dedicated bag in the toilet tank (see photo on top right). This will decrease the amount of water used for flushing.
- Another way is to insert in the tank weights that reduce water flow to the pre-set level (see photo on the bottom right).
- The last method is to use a cistern with a dual flushing button that lets you choose whether more or less water is used.

Decide which solution is the best for your context. If needed, ask toilet accessory sellers for advice. Considering how many times a toilet is flushed during a day, this simple measure can reduce large volumes of water while ensuring effective disposal of the toilet waste.

RECOMMENDED WATER-SAVING MEASURES

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$ 🕓 Inspect the water systems at your premises for leaks and address them immediately

Why: Water leaks can waste a large amount of water. We can show that we truly care about saving water by addressing them as soon as they are detected.

How: Most water is wasted when the water trickles from the toilet tank into the bowl, when a tap drips, or when plumbing leaks occur. Inspect all the toilets and taps and check for signs of leaks (e.g. water puddles, water dripping sounds, wet walls, etc.). At the same time, encourage your colleagues to immediately report any leakages to the logistics staff (or any other relevant staff) and instruct the staff to repair them immediately.

Opened Water Taps

In places where the water supply isn't reliable, people sometimes leave a tap open when the water doesn't flow. If this is your case, consider the following options: using foot-operated taps, knee-operated taps, or sensor taps if the power supply isn't an issue (use online search for details).

$ 🕓 Consider installing sensor taps

Why: Sensor taps automatically shut off when hands are removed; this significantly reduces water wastage compared to traditional manual taps. They can lead to substantial water savings, are more hygienic, and also promote a modern, eco-friendly image of your office.

How: Sensor taps are most appropriate in contexts where people often leave the tap running longer than necessary (if this is not the case, they might not be worth the investment). They are available in various models and price ranges, typically costing between $50 - $150 each. While they are easy to install, it is recommended to engage a plumber to ensure proper installation and to consult about maintenance aspects such as battery replacement or sensor calibration.

RECOMMENDED WATER-SAVING MEASURES

🕓 Review how much water is used for cleaning offices and washing vehicles and ensure that it is used more efficiently

Why: Washing vehicles and offices sometimes (unnecessarily) uses large amounts of water, so it is worth considering whether it could be done more efficiently.

How: Read online tips on how to wash a car while saving water (see example here) and then observe how your vehicles are washed. If you see that it could be done more efficiently, discuss with the drivers (or whoever washes the car) why your organisation would like to save water and how they could wash vehicles using less water. Agree on a water-efficient way of washing vehicles regularly. Use a similar approach with office cleaning - observe how it is done, and if you see opportunities for improvement, discuss them with the cleaners and agree on the required changes.

🕓 If your office has a garden, ensure it is watered early in the morning only

Why: Watering a garden in the early morning tends to be more efficient, as the water can soak into the soil and be absorbed before it evaporates. Compared to watering in the evening, it also reduces the risk of the leaves staying damp overnight, increasing the risk of diseases.

How: Ask the person responsible for watering the garden to do so in the early morning before it gets hot. Note: If needed, adjust this recommendation to the context of your country.

$$ 🕓🕓 If relevant, consider installing and using a rainwater harvesting system

Why: By capturing and storing rainwater, you can contribute to conserving water and reduce your costs.

How: Constructing a rainwater harvesting system makes sense if your office needs significant quantities of non-drinking water—for watering the garden, cleaning premises, washing vehicles, flushing toilets, and similar needs. At the same time, constructing such a system requires relatively large amounts of plastic, metal, cement, and other construction materials, so consider whether its environmental benefits will outweigh the environmental and financial costs. In many countries, rainwater harvesting systems are prevalent. Usually, there are also country-specific manuals and experts who can advise you on the design of your water tank. Since installing such systems cost between $400 - $1,500, it is worth using such guidance / experts when designing the system and supervising its construction.

YOUR CHECKLIST FOR SAVING WATER

On this website you can find a practical checklist helping you quickly assess the extent to which your organisation already uses the promoted water-saving measures. You can also include in the checklist any other measures that you or your colleagues proposed. The results will help you **decide which measures should you focus on**.

Measure	To what extent is it implemented?			
	Fully	Partially	Not implemented	Not possible to implement
Have you discussed with your colleagues what your organisation will do to save water?				
Have you installed aerators in all bathrooms in all the offices to reduce the water flow?				
If you use flush toilets, have you installed water-saving systems in all toilets?				
Have you inspected water systems at all your offices for leaks and addressed them?				
If people sometimes leave the taps on, have you considered using sensors?				
Have you reviewed how much water is used for cleaning offices and ensured that it is used efficiently?				
Have you reviewed how much water is used for washing vehicles and ensured that it is used efficiently?				
If you have a garden, have you ensured that it is watered early in the morning only? (unless a different approach is needed locally)				
Have you considered installing a rainwater				

This guide is offered by Civil Society Now.
It was prepared by People in Need in 2024.

The development of this guide was financially supported by the Czech Development Agency.