

PROVIDENCE BUSINESS NEWS

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PBN EDITORIAL

Water conservation yields many benefits

It may sound odd, but the Ocean State is grappling with a potential water shortage. And the impact on the economy could be serious.

The issue first surfaced three years ago when Amgen announced that it wanted to double daily water usage at its West Greenwich facility. A subsequent conflict with the Kent County Water Authority was only resolved when the General Assembly guaranteed that the bio-pharmaceutical firm would get the fresh water it needed to run its production lines.

But it became clear that if other companies wanted to build facilities that used water in large quantities (and many of the highly prized biotechnology enterprises do just that), something would have to change.

The Coalition for Water Security – an environmental/development/industry group formed to address the issue – has found that the state has enough fresh water at its disposal to meet current and future needs, presuming that the state is smart about how that water is used.

What is not smart is diverting 76 percent of Rhode Island household summer water usage to maintain verdant lawns. The coalition suggests limiting the number of days per week for watering, or establishing a standard, per-person water-usage target, with excess use incurring premium pricing.

The R.I. Water Resources Board is undertaking a multiyear study of the Hunt, Annaquatucket and Pettaquamscutt rivers to see what water conservation measures would be most effective.

The bottom line is the state needs to get serious about carefully stewarding its water resources – the economic and environmental cost of continually sucking more water out of the ground for vanity's sake has taken that option off the table. •