

**Editorial: Water will be scarce; We can't ignore the looming crisis of diminishing supplies**  
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The future of water supplies in California can be described in one simple phrase: increasing scarcity. As population grows and demand increases, climate change is almost certain to reduce supplies. That will dramatically alter the landscape, in more ways than one.

That's one of the conclusions that has emerged from the first International Water Technology Conference, being held through today at California State University, Fresno.

As dire as predictions for California's water future have become, we may comfort ourselves -- if that's the right word -- with the knowledge that things could get very much worse in other parts of the world.

In China, for instance, the astonishing pollution of rivers and lakes has led to frantic overdrafting of underground water. That has led to massive problems, including subsidence in some cities of more than six feet. As Beijing prepares to host the 2008 Olympics, one of the great concerns is whether sufficient supplies of water will be available for hundreds of thousands of visitors.

In Africa, pollution and drought combine to turn vast tracts of land into desert, forcing entire populations to migrate in search of water. The danger of armed conflict over water is great and growing.

Here in California our water wars are fought with legal briefs instead of guns -- at least today. But the potential problems are real and frightening.

That's why efforts such as this week's water conference are so valuable. Water experts from around the world came to share information and display new technologies, which will be crucial to solving the looming crisis.

And we had better grit our teeth for increased costs. An Environmental Protection Agency study in 2002 estimated that keeping up with the expected demand for water in 2020 could cost the nation more than a half-trillion dollars. Water is a commodity as well as a necessity, and Americans

have grown used to having their water supplies heavily subsidized. That will change, and the impact will be deeply felt.

New storage capacity, both above and below ground, is needed, but it will be costly and take many years to bring on line. We can all begin to conserve water right now -- today -- and there is enormous potential for savings in doing so.

New and improved technologies like the ones discussed at the water conference have an important place in the effort. Perhaps the best thing that happens at such gatherings is the cross-fertilization that takes place between experts in different aspects of water issues. As an example, the conference heard suggestions that new irrigation techniques in agriculture may have applications for urban residential landscapes, which account for an enormous amount of the water used by city dwellers.

We're all in this one together, and the sooner we learn to work across the spectrum of public and private institutions and individuals, the sooner we'll see solutions we can all live with. #