

World Water Week – what went on?

World Water Week, the leading conference on global water issues and a key date for the industry, recently took place in Stockholm. The theme this year was ‘Seeing the Unseen: The Value of Water’ and is a perfect phrase to describe the current state of the industry.

Temps de lecture : minute

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With COP27 under two months away and a record-breaking summer of heatwaves now behind us, there is no denying that a climate crisis is underway. Pressure for urgent climate action is intensifying as the window of opportunity to achieve Net Zero by 2050 narrows.

However, although the year is constantly mentioned within the industry, 2050 is by no means around the corner... meaning it is not helpful for creating a sense of urgency among businesses. Instead, the 2030 target, which gives businesses eight years to cut their emissions in half is a more helpful reminder of the severity of the situation.

Unknown to many, water accounts for around 5% of carbon emissions in the UK meaning that, if businesses put as much effort into reducing water as they do with energy, they could save money alongside improving their sustainability credentials.

What’s changed?

Whilst businesses have always been keen to save money where possible, in today’s economic and environmental climate, cutting back is something

all businesses are currently aiming for.

As part of the recent heightened focus on climate change following an unusually hot summer, water scarcity has been pushed to the forefront of conversation. With Sky News *declaring* a drought in eight areas and CNN *reporting* that, according to the European Drought Observatory, more than 60% of land in the EU and UK is experienced drought conditions this summer, the seeds of fear have been planted.

What can we do?

Given the importance of water efficiency from an environmental and financial perspective, businesses and consumers should be prioritising it.

Of course, there are plenty of 'quick wins' to reduce water usage including turning off taps, having short showers and fixing leaks.

However, to drive change on a larger scale and to accelerate the pace, a common and communal effort is needed by the global community to improve water access, water quality and waste management technology. Governments also have a role to play in reducing the water footprint of each country as a whole.

Surprisingly to many, SMEs account for 99.9% of the business population meaning they have a significant responsibility for reducing the UK's overall carbon emissions. As a result, the government should focus more on supporting SMEs with targeted measures. Not only do they make up the majority of the business population, but they are younger and more agile than larger companies meaning they are more open to change.

The UK water industry

The water industry can also help by providing expertise and guidance. At

Everflow, we can provide non-household (NHH) customers with a personalised report showing fully costed and personalised water efficiency recommendations, with the potential to save up to 70% on water bills and improve water efficiency.

More can be done though to share data and insights across the industry and across different businesses. If water wholesalers and providers were able to tap into a vast pool of water usage information through better data collaboration, then issues and opportunities for optimisation could more easily be identified. This would require a change in mindset and new processes being established but if the will of the industry matches the urgency and scale of the climate problem, then change could be possible.

The barriers to progress

This approach could and should be replicated internationally for even greater efficacy.

Similarly to the UK, drought is gripping China and northern Mexico in events regarded as the worst on record. Contrastingly, other parts of the world, including Seoul have experienced flash flooding this winter and Pakistan is dealing with a flooding.

Unless every country does their part in combatting the threat of climate change - even if the environmental gains are seemingly marginal - the transition to net-zero transition will be near impossible. That there is an urgent need for greater international cooperation from national water industries to create a truly global community of data and idea sharing capable of advancing water system technology and tackling climate change on a large scale. The necessity for global collaboration to ensure the net-zero transition for the industry is equitable for all nations. If elements such as technology are shared even nationwide then things can be improved a lot better and quicker.

Solution

Strides can be made if governments begin to share both their ideas and their data. Within the UK, there is a strong consensus for the sector to come together to agree on methodology and standards for structuring, collecting and reporting data as a foundation for data sharing. Whilst there is currently collaboration between companies, this needs to extend and go global if sufficient improvements are to be made from national water industries. Once technology is shared and in turn advanced, both water efficiency and climate resilience will improve within the sector. The potential opportunities and benefits of greater data are vast and need to happen if we want to meet both the 2030 and the 2050 targets.

As well as sharing data, governments should engage with businesses and establish incentives encouraging companies to be efficient and transparent in their water use. Examples of this would be to create legislation or voluntary agreements per sector or to engage with citizens, raising awareness of their water footprint and consumption as well as offering guidance on how to reduce it.

When it comes to outside of their borders, governments can focus foreign aid on improving the sustainable management of water resources in locations where the external water footprint lies, as well as working with trade partners to ensure the sustainable production of goods that are imported and exported. Ultimately, they can work towards the promotion of international agreements on maximum sustainable water footprint limits.

Everyone needs to work together to reach water efficiency targets. It's in nobody's interest to leave anyone behind as this will only set all of us back. All learning and education needs to be shared so that others can benefit. Otherwise, the benefits will only go so far if learnings are kept within one community.

Josh Gill, CEO and Founder of *Everflow*.

Article by Josh Gill