

In December 2012, the European Commission revealed its plan to regulate water-related products under the framework of the Ecodesign Directive. That's great news, both for the environment and consumers. Ecodesign aims at improving the energy and environmental performance of a product throughout its life cycle¹. Optimising the environmental and energy performance of water-related products, while maintaining their functional qualities, protects the environment and at the same time provides new opportunities for manufacturers, consumers and society as a whole.

1 The Consumers' point of view

Close to three quarters of Europeans think that the EU should propose additional measures to address water problems in Europe, according to a Eurobarometer survey published in March 2012. 68% of Europeans see droughts, floods and chemical pollution as significant challenges and 73% of Europeans call for more measures at EU-level to reduce water problems².

2 Sending electricity down the drain

Although most taps and showerheads do not consume energy, they are energy-related products since they regulate the actual volume of (heated) water being consumed and therefore the energy consumption of water heating equipment³.

Studies estimate the potential savings of energy at about 246 TWh per year, i.e. more than twice the annual national residential electricity consumption in the UK⁴.

3 Saving water? Why should I bother?

Water scarcity is an increasingly frequent and worrying phenomenon that affects at least 11% of the European population and 17% of EU territory. Since 1980, the number of droughts in Europe has increased, and they have become more severe, costing an estimated €100 billion over the past 30 years. One of the worst droughts occurred in 2003, when one-third of EU territory and over 100 million people were affected. Between 1976 and 2006, the number of people and areas hit by drought rose by almost 20%, and the yearly average cost has quadrupled. Demand for water continues to rise across Europe, putting a strain on our resources. It is estimated that some 20-40% of Europe's available water is being wasted (leakages in the supply system, no water saving technologies installed, too much unnecessary irrigation, dripping taps etc.)⁵.

Countries one would not really classify as dry, such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, need to import water in order to meet the needs of their population. These needs exceed by far their own resources. Belgium is no exception. 80% of Belgian domestic water consumption, and the water used for the production of goods and food production, is provided from abroad⁶.

¹ Commission Staff Working Document Establishment of the Working Plan 2012-2014 under the Ecodesign Directive

² Eurobarometer, 22 March 2012 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-289_en.htm?locale=fr

³ Study on Amended Ecodesign Working Plan under the Ecodesign Directive <http://www.ecodesignwp2.eu/downloads/FINAL%20REPORT%20Task%203%2016-12-2011.pdf>

⁴ Study on Amended Ecodesign Working Plan under the Ecodesign Directive <http://www.ecodesign-wp2.eu/downloads/FINAL%20REPORT%20Task%203%2016-12-2011.pdf>

⁵ Water scarcity and drought in the European Union, August 2010 <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/quantity/pdf/brochure.pdf>

⁶ Test-Achats n° 521, June 2008



“Showers and baths represent around 39% of the average daily water consumption at home.”

4 The Consumers' point of view

Taps account for about 16% of domestic consumption. Flow reducers or aerators, costing just a few Euros, which mix air with the flow of water and create a lighter water jet, can help to reduce our water use substantially⁷.

Considering that a traditional tap delivers on average 15 litres of water per minute, and assuming one takes a shower of 5 minutes daily, this amounts to 75 litres a day per person⁸.

Market research done by our members has shown that a small investment of 10€ is enough to halve water consumption without compromising comfort: The right taps, showerheads, and the use of flow reducer valves, can reduce water consumption by up to 50%⁹.

Common rules on shower heads would also eliminate the worst performing appliances from the markets, thereby making sure that all consumers save water. Consumers will also be better prevented from paying too much for inefficient products, currently marketed with green claims despite their performance being no better than comparable products¹⁰.

Water taps and showerheads are made more efficient mostly by applying mechanical changes in their design; efficient models do not represent a shift in technology. The shift to efficient water taps and showerheads would come at no extra upfront cost or aesthetic discomfort to consumers. Flow rate limits could be set in such a way that there is no reduction in comfort¹¹.



⁷ Altroconsumo n°216, June 2008

⁸ FRC magazine n° 32, October 2010

⁹ Test-Achats n° 521, June 2008

¹⁰ Our Spanish member OCU, in their June 2008 magazine issue reports that, for a very moderate cost, efficient showerheads can reduce water consumption by one quarter. It also draws attention to unjustified price differences: for instance, the most expensive showerhead in its analysis cost 150 euros and reduced the flow by only 27%, whereas another model of 19 euros reduced the flow by 76%. It also warns that taps that are presented as savers and are labelled "eco" can be at least as wasteful than products marketed more modestly since advertising claims in this field are not regulated.

¹¹ ANEC-BEUC comments on the Ecodesign Working Plan 2012-2014