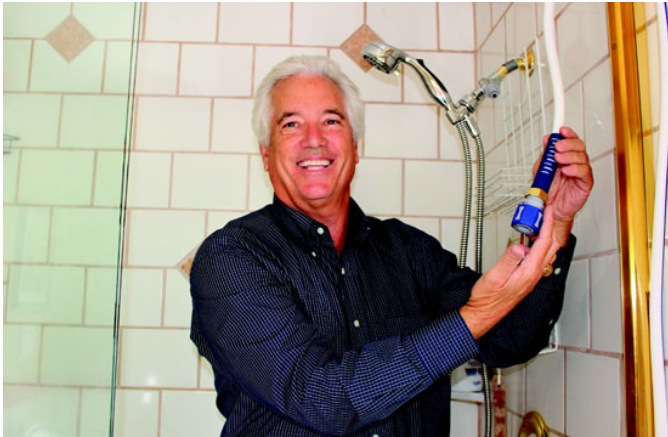


Published June 3rd, 2015

## Drip by Drip

By Chris Lavin



Stephen "Steamer" Stanley demonstrates how his shower diversion invention can be disconnected or engaged in one step. Photo Chris Lavin

five-gallon buckets in the shower, then hauling them out," Stanley said. With water weighing eight pounds a gallon, that's no easy task. "So that's how we came up with this."

Stanley stepped into a shower (note: fully clothed) and with a simple close of a valve, demonstrated what the two former Orindans have invented. It's the "shower water saver kit," which diverts water from the shower pipe into a small reservoir. When the person who wants a shower feels the pipe begin to warm, he or she flips the valve off again and can shower instantly. "Then watch," Stanley said as he stepped over to remove the ceramic top of the toilet tank and flushed the toilet. Water began to pour through a plastic hose snaking into the top of the tank and ran until the tank was, again, full, and then shut off. The water had come from the reservoir of cold shower water. "It's that simple," Stanley said.

At a time when many homeowners are starting to get embarrassed by their lush lawns or thirsty ornamental gardens, inventions like Stanley and Gompertz's are becoming more popular. "We waste so much water in this country," he said. "So, so much." With the current water shortage, regulatory agencies have become involved, making conservation mandatory. Homeowners are finding out where their water meters are located, and monitoring their use of gallons.

According to the California Department of Water Resources, the average household uses 360 gallons of fresh, treated water every day. Gov. Jerry Brown has called for a 20 percent reduction in that number, which has EBMUD and individual users thinking about how to make that cut. Agencies have recommended measures that are becoming more widely used, such as:

Install water-efficient fixtures and appliances, such as dishwashers and washing machines, or point-source hot-water heaters.

Don't follow Erma Bombeck's advice and do cram the dishwasher (and fill the washing machine) before you click the "on" button.

Get a high-efficiency toilet, or put a brick in the tank to displace some water.

Don't flush for pee. Follow the "yellow is mellow, brown goes down" rule.

Get a foaming hand-soap dispenser, thoroughly soap up hands, and then turn on the water to rinse off.

Just before the late great comedic writer Erma Bombeck died in 1996, she made a list of the things she would have done differently in her life. One of the things she listed, besides not worrying about whether she wore make-up before she went out: she would have run her dishwasher more often before it was full, making life a little bit easier.

That was obviously thinking in pre-drought, pre-water-conscious California. In Lamorinda, most people - besides cramming their dishwashers full before hitting the "on" switch - are thinking instead about how they can conserve water in their homes. Conversations about rain barrels, gray water systems, and drip irrigation are becoming commonplace. Some are even putting buckets into their showers to catch the cold water before it gets warm and then using it to flush their toilets. And that got former Orinda Chamber of Commerce president Stephen "Steamer" Stanley and his business partner, Mike Gompertz, thinking.

"We were hearing about some people putting

Shut the faucet off while brushing teeth, for goodness sake.

Shorten the shower by a couple of minutes.

Other ways to conserve are less obvious. On one small community water system in Canyon, usage dropped dramatically when board members started printing the average daily use of each user on the back of the quarterly bills. Some households were using an average of 60 gallons a day, others more than 200. The largest users immediately began to curtail their usage. "They just didn't know how much they were using," said Stanley when told this anecdote. "Most people don't."

And diverting the water that goes down the drain while the user waits for it to get warm is yet another way to save.

"Every house is unique," Stanley said. In some houses, the water to the kitchen sink might come out hot almost instantly, while the shower water stays cold for a minute or two until it gets warm. In other houses, that situation could be reversed. "It all depends on where the water heater is located," he said, "and how big the house is."

Stanley's patented shower invention, which is a DIY \$125 kit, fills a plastic, stand-alone reservoir that can then be used for anything - drinking by people or pets, watering plants, you name it. When asked why use good, treated water to flush a toilet, Stanley replied, "Otherwise it would be going down the drain." Good point. (But Stanley and Gompertz are developing a gray-water system too. "Just wait," Stanley said.) More information can be found at [www.housewatersaver.com](http://www.housewatersaver.com).

"As a community, as a state, as a country, we need to conserve water," Stanley said. "Why should you waste something just because you have it?"



The blue ring shows the attachment of the reservoir hose. A turn of a valve diverts the water; the closing allows water to flow through the showerhead.



One, two, three: Sink, shower reservoir, toilet. The reservoir has a spigot at the bottom for filling other receptacles. Photos Chris Lavin



The clear plastic hose at the top of the toilet tank comes from the reservoir of cold shower water that is stored, rather than drained, from the shower. Photo Chris Lavin

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