

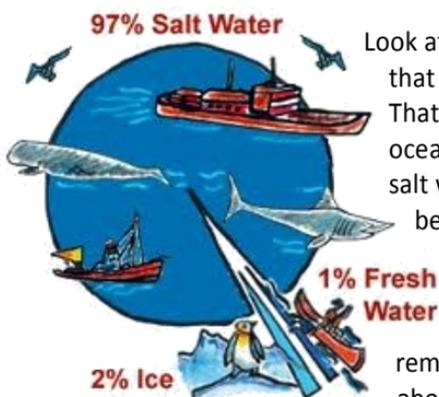
Let's Learn About...

Our Drinking Water



When you look at pictures of the earth taken from outer space, it looks like most of it is covered with water.

So, how can there be water shortages or water use restrictions in some parts of the world? Although there is an abundance of water on Earth, only a small amount of it is suitable for drinking and sometimes it's just not enough.



Look at the image to the left and you will see that 97% of Earth's water is found in the oceans. That's a lot of water but the problem is that ocean water is salty; humans cannot drink salt water - we'd get very sick. The salt could be removed from the water but the process is very, very expensive plus ocean water contains so much salt that at least 99.2% of the salt would have to be removed to avoid a salty taste. So, what about the remaining 3% of water?

Well, 2% of it is locked in polar ice caps and glaciers. It's too hard to get to and therefore unavailable. **So that leaves just 1% that is usable for drinking.** The available water comes from different sources: rivers, lakes, streams, reservoirs, and even from underground. Water that comes from the rivers, lakes and reservoirs is called **surface water**. Water that comes from underground through wells, aquifers and springs is called **ground water**.

It's hard to imagine that with so much water on this planet so little can actually be used for drinking. Before it's safe to drink though, it must be "cleaned" to remove any bacteria, pollutants and other potentially harmful substances that may have gotten in it. We're lucky because in Wilmington/New Hanover County, as in most parts of the United States, the water is cleaned at a water treatment plant and delivered right to our homes, schools and businesses. Water that has been cleaned and is safe to drink is called **potable** - *POTE-uh-ble* (rhymes with *floatable*). Therefore, **non-potable** water is not safe for us to drink.

Keep in mind that this potable water is used not only for drinking but for just about all of our daily activities that include the use of water: cooking, cleaning, bathing, watering plants and gardens, firefighting, irrigation, and so much more. With so little water actually available you can see why it is truly a precious and valuable resource.

Now that you've read about our drinking water, you should be able to answer these questions:

1. What percentage of Earth's water can be used for drinking?
2. In order to be drinkable, how much salt needs to be removed from ocean water?
3. Why does water need to be cleaned before it's safe to drink?
4. What word lets you know the water is suitable for drinking?
5. Is ocean water potable or non-potable?

Learn more about your water/sewer utilities by visiting our website: www.cfpua.org and clicking on the Education & Outreach link under Public Info.

