

# behind the news

Magazine



## HOT TOPIC || WATER... is the world running out?



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decide



**TOAD BUSTERS!**  
Would you collect toads  
for cash?



**THE HOLE TRUTH**  
... about body piercing



**ASP WORLD TOUR**  
Surf's up!

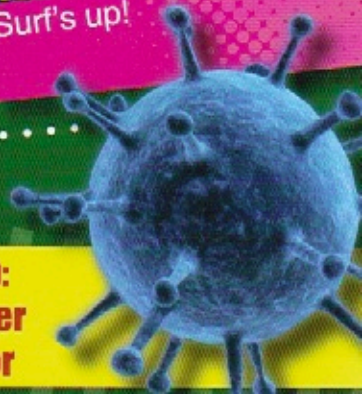
ARSON  
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**PLUS**

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Design a  
T-shirt

■ **Cool School:**  
Aberfoyle  
Park podcasts

■ **Cool Job:**  
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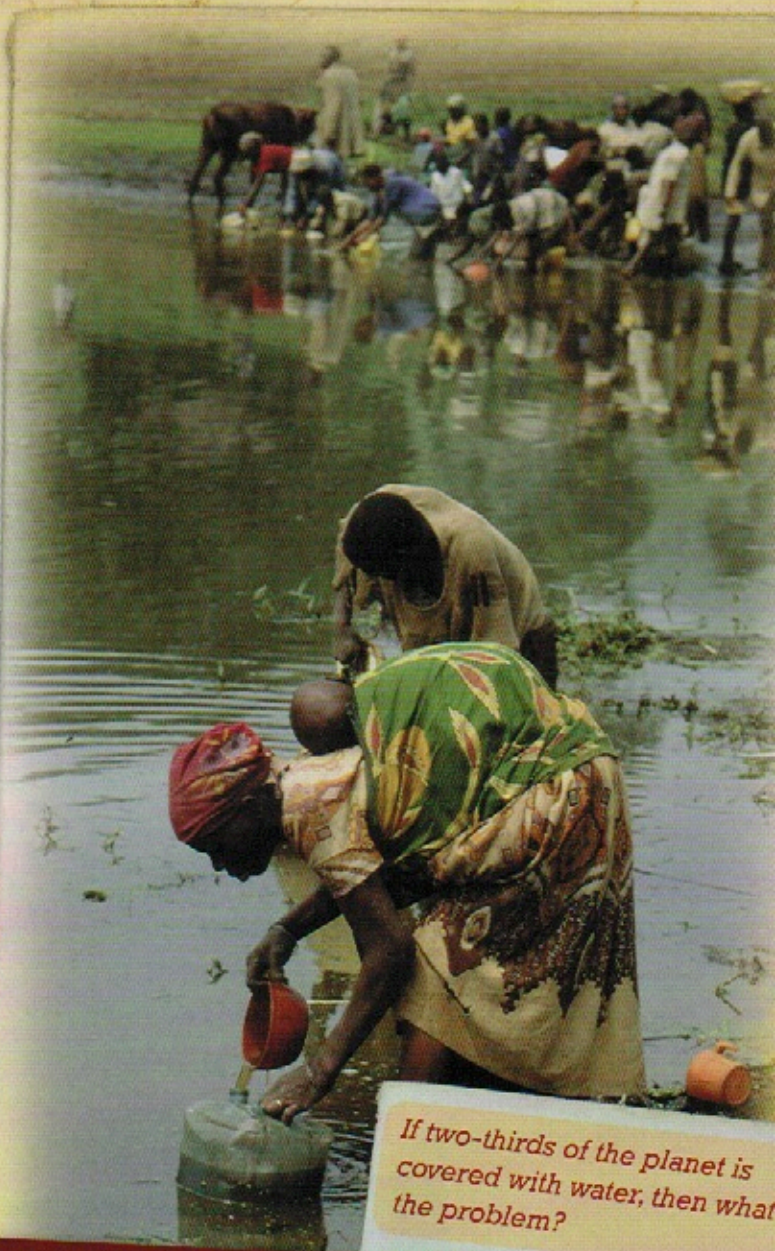
# WATER-STRESSED World

If the world is not running out of water, then why do more than 1 billion people live without access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion live without sanitation? **Marian McGuinness** taps into the mystery.

**C**an you imagine anything worse than a *flying toilet*? In some developing countries, a flying toilet is the most common type of toilet there is. Here's how it works: you use a plastic bag as a toilet, tie it up and then throw it into the street.

And how far do you have to walk for a glass of water? Perhaps no further than your kitchen. Imagine walking for 6 kilometres each day, lugging 20 litres of water. This is usually the job of women and girls in these water-stressed countries.

Today, 700 million people live in water-stressed countries. By 2025, 3 billion people (35 per cent of the projected global population) will be affected by water stress or scarcity.



*If two-thirds of the planet is covered with water, then what the problem?*

Less than 1 per cent of the Earth's water is fresh. With 6 billion people in the world, one-sixth live without access to safe water; that is, water uncontaminated by sewage, chemicals, dead animals and deadly diseases.



**WATER-STRESS** is when people's need for water exceeds nature's supply, or when the water supply is affected by:

- pollution (human, animal or chemical waste)
- excessive consumption by agriculture and industrial development
- population growth
- natural disasters such as drought
- overuse of water bores, which drain underground water tables
- poor water management.

## Safe water and sanitation— basic human rights

World leaders try to raise awareness about the global problem of water stress. In 2001, Kofi Annan, the then United Nations (UN) Secretary-General said: 'Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and, therefore, a basic human right.' In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognised 'that every child has the right to live in safe and hygienic conditions'.

Millions of people live without these basic human rights. However, in some places, things are changing. Some schools in India are getting new toilet facilities and children are being taught good hygiene practices, which will help prevent them dying from water-related diseases.

## Water-related diseases

Water-related diseases cause over 12 million deaths each year. They can occur when water:

- is polluted by human, animal or chemical wastes
- has disease-causing organisms living in it
- is home to disease-carrying insects, such as mosquitoes
- is scarce, allowing some diseases to thrive.

## World Water Day

The United Nations established 22 March as World Water Day to draw attention to the water crisis that affects nearly 20 per cent of the world's population. For 2008, the focus of World Water Day is 'Sanitation'. At the UN Millennium Summit, world leaders also made a commitment to halve the number of people without access to safe water and sanitation by 2015. That year will mark the end of the International Decade of Action: Water for Life.

Some goals of the Water for Life decade are:

- setting up water, sanitation and hygiene education programs in every school
- investing in toilets in homes and schools
- involving women in the planning of water and sanitation facilities (relocation of wells, bore holes and toilets close to home, as well as hygiene training).

## WHAT CAN I DO?

You can brainstorm ways to act locally about this global problem. Here are a few starters:

» Learn about a country in crisis and present a talk at your school assembly.

» Raise funds by organising a Walk for Water Day.

» Check out what organisations such as UNICEF (Voices of Youth) are doing about global water issues and what you can do to help.

