

World Toilet Day on 19th November reminds us that the world is seriously off-track to meet the sanitation MDG target – to halve the proportion of people without access to sanitation by 2015. If current rates of progress continue, the global sanitation goal will be met 30 years too late. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the sanitation target in that region is not due to be met for another 200 years. However, we also recognise the importance of water conservation during times of water scarcity, and in ensuring robust sanitation systems remain as economical as possible.

Children living in households with no toilet are twice as likely to get diarrhoea as those with a toilet. With this in mind it is important to note that diarrhoea kills more children every year than AIDS, malaria and measles combined. In fact one gram of human faeces can contain 10,000,000 viruses, 1,000,000 bacteria, 1,000 parasite cysts, and 100 parasite eggs.

Many deem the toilet to be one of the most important inventions of mankind. Toilets are also a good economic investment as sanitation is the most cost-effective of any health intervention. For every £1 invested in water and sanitation, £8 is returned in increased economic productivity. However, poor water and sanitation costs Sub-Saharan Africa around 5% of its GDP each year, equivalent to the amount of aid the continent currently receives from western nations. Sanitation requires water. We are conscious of the impending problem of water scarcity. The importance of water conservation has become more apparent to water industries and users, and has led to innovative conservation appliances being developed such as dual flush toilet systems. Many buildings in the UK have rain water harvesting (RWH) systems to produce grey water suitable to flush toilets, in order to reduce mains water consumption. Water conservation has become a prime concern, and in the current economic climate can assist in making savings on water bills.

Nick Reeves OBE, CIWEM's Executive Director said:

“On the national level water conservation is a priority, and although government regulation means that most toilets in new-build will be dual-flush, we call for increased policies encouraging rainwater harvesting systems for use in toilet flushes, and other grey water use in the home. In line with America and Australia we would encourage the government to consider increased tax incentives for those wishing to implement rain water harvesting systems in the UK.”