



The Importance of Fresh Water

Fresh water supports agriculture, fishing and forestry, manufacturing, and recreational activities; provides a means of transporting goods and people; and produces energy. Fresh-water ecosystems supply nutrients and sediments, and help regulate floods and droughts. The availability of fresh water affects every aspect of our lives, everywhere around the world.

As a result of burgeoning populations and the rising demand for water, twice the volume of fresh water is being withdrawn from the world's freshwater sources compared to 50 years ago. Water is a scarce commodity in many countries. Figure 3.1.2 compares the percentage of the world's population by region with the available fresh water in that region.

Canada is fortunate to have abundant, available fresh water—7 percent of the world's supply—and Canadians are the highest per capita users in the world. Some facts:

- Canada's rivers discharge 7 percent of the world's renewable water supply.
- Almost 9 percent of Canada's total area is covered by fresh water.
- Canada has a quarter of the world's wetlands—an important source of fresh water.
- Canada has more water under the ground than on the surface.
- The Great Lakes are the largest system of fresh surface water on Earth.
- 40 percent of Canada's boundary with the United States is composed of water.



Figure 3.1.1 The importance of water in the activities of daily life is one of the themes expressed in *Netsilik River* by Inuit artist Pitseolak Ashoona. How do you use fresh water, directly and indirectly, in your daily life?

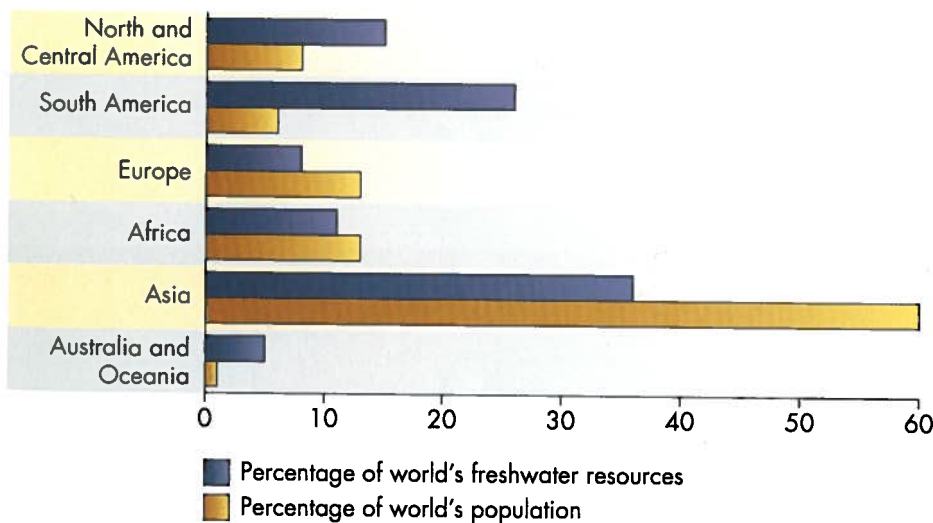


Figure 3.1.2 Percentage of world population and available fresh water by region. Which regions have the greatest imbalances?