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**OKANAGAN MAYORS & FIRE CHIEFS GATHER
TO ENCOURAGE WATER CONSERVATION**

Lake Country, B.C. – Syilx Territory – Despite cooler temperatures and recent rainfall, the Okanagan’s water supply is still experiencing the effects of last year’s extreme drought and low snowpack. As such, there is concern about the potential for drought in the valley this summer and the possibility of wildfires. In response, local mayors, fire chiefs and those working in water came together yesterday at Lakestone Villas in Lake Country to deliver a message on wise water use during drought and wildfires.

The gathering marked the launch of the annual “Make Water Work” campaign, delivered by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)’s Okanagan WaterWise program and in partnership with local governments, water utilities, and garden centre and irrigation businesses throughout the valley.

“The reason we are meeting today at Lakestone Villas, is because of the story it tells and the one we need to learn from,” explained OBWB Communications Director Corinne Jackson. “This complex is a fabulous example of doing it right. It shows us how a community that follows WaterWise and FireSmart principles can save water and withstand fire, even as flames surround it.

“As we experience hotter and drier summers, and as our population increases – the importance of being WaterWise and FireSmart is becoming very clear,” Jackson added.

Lake Country Fire Chief Darren Lee echoed the message. Looking around the neighbourhood he added that by following the building code and choosing plants, such as those on the Make Water Work Plant Collection list, “you end up with this nice combination of low water use, beautiful neighbourhood, and from the get-go it’s firesmart.”

Speaking to the importance of being WaterWise, especially during a drought and with the threat of wildfires, Lee had advice for those with homes threatened by fire. If you have sprinklers, go ahead and put them out, or leave them at the end of your driveway, but do not turn them on and leave.

“There’s only so much volume available... It’s not a limitless supply of water,” Lee said, recalling last year’s fire in a nearby community where firefighters ran out of water, and had to have water trucked in from the other side of town. Luckily it worked out, he added, but it can be a dangerous situation.

“I did see some things on social media where people were commenting on dry hydrants... I don’t think they were dry hydrants. I think they were hydrants that someone had exhausted the reservoir to.”

As part of this year’s campaign, Jackson worked with FireSmart BC staff to add the FireSmart designation to plants in the Make Water Work Plant Collection.

The plant collection was initially developed in 2014, with the Okanagan Xeriscape Association, as an easy way for residents to begin the journey of transitioning to a more WaterWise landscape. Today, it includes 105 perennials, grasses, shrubs and trees, and is available at nine garden centres throughout the valley, from Armstrong to Osoyoos, “New this year, we have worked with FireSmart BC to ensure our list not only meets WaterWise standards, but is FireSmart too,” Jackson added.

Lake Country Mayor and Okanagan Basin Water Board Chair Blair Ireland urged residents to visit the Make Water Work website, pledge to conserve this summer, and take steps to ensure their yard is WaterWise and FireSmart. “We don’t know how the weather is going to line up this summer,” he added, acknowledging that water conditions can change quickly in the Okanagan.

Staff from Kel-Lake Garden Centre, a Make Water Work partner, were also on hand for the campaign launch. Manager Sarah Patton said people sometimes think that by choosing WaterWise or FireSmart plants that they have limited options. “That is simply not the case,” Patton said. “We are getting in plant material on a regular basis. We are cutting out things like cedars. We don’t want people to come in and be tempted to get those sorts of things when we have so many different alternatives,” she added.

Okanagan residents are encouraged to visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca and find tips to maintain a beautiful yard while conserving water, find water restrictions for their neighbourhood, the Make Water Work Plant Collection, and to pledge.

Pledges include:

1. Water lawn between dusk and dawn.
2. Water plants, not pavement.
3. Never mow low. Let it grow.
4. Choose plants suitable to our dry climate.
5. Tune up my irrigation.
6. Aerate my lawn and top dress with compost.

The campaign runs until mid-October. The community with the most pledges will be awarded the title “Make Water Work Community Champions” and those that pledge are entered to win one of two \$500 WaterWise yard upgrades.

And, as an added bonus for City of Kelowna water utility customers, the municipality offers rebates to those who purchase and install plants from the Make Water Work Plant Collection with up to \$100 for single family residential properties and \$300 for a strata complex. Find details here: <https://bit.ly/4aNZPiC>.

The [Make Water Work](#) campaign was first launched in 2011 and is aimed at tackling the second largest use of water in the valley – residential outdoor use.