The Earth's Water

Water Distribution

- Oceans: 97.5 percent
- Fresh water: 2.5 percent
- Glaciers: 68.7 percent
- Groundwater: 30.1 percent
- Permafrost: 0.8 percent
- Surface and atmosphere: 0.4 percent

Freshwater Use

- Sector usage of withdrawn water (consumptive and nonconsumptive)
  - Agriculture: 68 percent
  - Domestic and other industrial: 19 percent
  - Power: 10 percent
  - Evaporation from reservoirs: 3 percent

Freshwater Use

- Consumptive use of withdrawn water by sector
  - Agriculture: 33 percent
  - Domestic and other industrial: 7 percent

Note: When humans use water, they affect the quantity, timing, or quality of water available to other users. Water for human use typically involves withdrawing water from lakes, rivers, or groundwater and either consuming it so that it reenters the atmospheric part of the hydrological cycle or returning it to the hydrological basin. When irrigated crops use water, it is consumptive use—it becomes unavailable for use elsewhere in the basin. In contrast, releasing water from a dam to drive hydroelectric turbines is generally a nonconsumptive use because the water is available for downstream users but not necessarily at the appropriate time. Withdrawals by a city for domestic and industrial use are mainly nonconsumptive, but if the returning water is inadequately treated, the quality of the water downstream is affected.

Source: Multiple, as quoted by World Bank, 2010.