

Residents asked to cut water use 15%

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It has been said that drastic times require drastic measures, but some water purveyors have begun promoting water conservation as a preventive measure rather than waiting until the Antelope Valley runs dry.

Palmdale Water District board members on May 23 voted to ask customers to voluntarily cut water use by 15%. Quartz Hill Water District's board plans to focus on conservation at the next meeting on June 13, according to that agency's general manager. And Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts officials will launch a water conservation campaign on June 21, an agency spokeswoman said.

The Palmdale Water District resolution calling for water conservation said low snow and rainfall this year, "opposition to the development and construction of water supply facilities and legal restrictions on the flow of State Water Project water to Southern California" all have contributed to shortages in the water supply.

"Groundwater supplies, which provide a supplemental source of water to the district, are limited in nature," the resolution said, adding that the district's use of groundwater could face legal challenges from the Antelope Valley basin groundwater adjudication case now before a judge.

Palmdale Water District attempted through its public information program to advise and alert consumers about "the serious nature of the water supply situation but has not experienced any significant reduction in consumer demand," the resolution states.

"We need that 15%. We really do," said Claudette Roberts, water conservation manager.

This year Palmdale Water District was allocated 60% of its entitlement from California Aqueduct, Roberts said, compared to last year when the agency could have taken the full entitlement of 21,300 acre-feet. Each acre-foot equals 326,000 gallons.

Although last year's precipitation meant water aplenty, PWD General Manager Dennis LaMoreaux said, "We couldn't use it all. We tried to carry some over to this year. We were able to use (the carryover) through January and a little into February before they ruled carryover water was gone from the system."

At this time, Palmdale Water District doesn't have the ability to take all the surplus water from its entitlement during a wet year and won't until the treatment plant improvements are completed, LaMoreaux said.

Last year, production of treated water to PWD customers totaled 27,930 acre-feet, he said, with the average single-family household consuming 1 acre-foot for the year. This year, through the end of April, production of treated water reached 7,018 acre-feet.

To satisfy all customers, the need this year is projected at 28,350 acre-feet, LaMoreaux said. But the supply is roughly 4,000 acre-feet short, he added.

"You can't make up the shortfall by pumping additional groundwater," he said.

With an outlook that bleak, the district administrators hope consumers will respond to the request for conserving the natural resource.

"We're trying to get people on the right track," Roberts said. "We don't want to go into mandatory enforcement unless our supplies continue to run low." However, she said, "if it's as dry as it has been into the next year, we'll have a more severe problem."

That means the district can demand folks cut their water use.

That's true among water purveyors large and small throughout the Valley.

Quartz Hill Water District General Manager Chad Reed said at its June 13 the Quartz Hill Water board is expected to vote on a resolution asking customers to conserve water. In addition, he said, the district is looking at conservation methods for new homes.

Reed said he didn't know if 15% also would be Quartz Hill's target figure.

"We'll leave it up to the board to establish a number," he said.

Some conservation suggestions aim at reducing indoor water use and other recommendations target the outdoors, Reed said, noting that 60% to 70% of residential water goes to landscaping.

"If we could lower that number, it would be great," Reed said. "We're looking at possibly 20% to 30% reductions for developers."

Los Angeles Waterworks District 40, which covers much of west Palmdale and parts of Lancaster, is undertaking a large-scale conservation education campaign, according to Melinda Barrett, an agency spokeswoman.

"The more we're all on the same page, the better," Barrett said.

Waterworks 40 is partnering with Home Depot in Palmdale and with the Antelope Valley Resource Conservation District "to give people tips and tools to conserve. Our focus is on the outdoor use over summer."

Barrett said the minimal target would be a 10% use reduction, "but 15% makes sense."

For the campaign, which kicks off June 21, Barrett said, "We will work with local home improvement stores to make native plants available."

PWD also has an upcoming event slated to focus on conservation - an open house from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on June 23 to teach folks how to reduce water use by 15%, Roberts said.

Most people water their lawns twice a day. If they shaved two minutes off the watering time on their automatic sprinklers, that would save four minutes per day of water, or 28 minutes, nearly a half-hour each week.

People also can check indoor leaks, Roberts said. Put food color in the toilet tank and check after 15 minutes to see if the water in the toilet bowl has changed color.

"Changing the toilet flapper could solve the problem. That's usually where the leak occurs. A leaky faucet is usually just a washer. These fixes (don't cost) a whole lot of money - things you could do right off the

bat."

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