

August 8, 2014

For Immediate Release

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Santa Margarita Water District Directors Approve Conservation Measures

While commending customers for dramatically cutting their water use during California's historic drought, Santa Margarita Water District directors on Wednesday enacted irrigation limits and other reductions in outdoor water use.

Residential lawn watering is limited to three days a week and new swimming pools cannot be filled under the second-stage conservation measures unanimously enacted by directors of SMWD, the second-largest water district in Orange County. Existing swimming pools can be filled up to a foot for maintenance, the regulations say.

The State Water Resources Control Board ordered the additional restrictions and also gave water districts the authority to fine residents who waste water. SMWD will focus on public outreach and helping customers use water more efficiently, General Manager Dan Ferons said. SMWD customers have reduced their water use by 20 percent since the drought began three years ago.

"Our primary interest is education," Ferons told the board. "We're not interested in going out with water cops in the middle of the night to see who's watering on the wrong day."

He cautioned, however, that those who flagrantly waste water or ignore the district's efforts could face penalties. Leaks and other plumbing malfunctions, for example, must be repaired within 48 hours of notification from the district under Wednesday's action.

Ferons said much of the district's efforts are focusing on getting large landscape clients – master community associations and homeowner associations – to reduce their water use. Those large users make up 5 percent of the district's accounts, but use 35 percent of the district's water.

"We're making a real push with the HOAs," Ferons said. "That's where we can have the greatest impact with the least inconvenience to our customers."

Even in the regulations mandated by the state, there are exceptions in the SMWD regulations: HOAs, for example, can submit a plan to the district that allows frequent water of some areas while cutting back in others, as long as an overall water savings is achieved.

For homeowners, those with drip or other high-efficiency systems or weather-based irrigation timers, are exempt from the three-day watering restrictions, too.

Rebates are offered for drip and other efficient watering systems, as well as \$2 per square foot for those who pull out their turf lawns altogether.

Commercially, restaurants are prohibited from serving water unless a customer asks for it. Not only does serving unwanted water waste what is in the glass, more water is needlessly lost when the glass is washed.

SMWD Board President Sandra Jacobs said that even as customers have responded well to calls for conservation, they recognize the state is calling for more.

“Finding ways to save water together has almost become a community event,” Jacobs said. “As unfortunate as the drought is, it’s bringing people together all working toward a common goal.”

With 155,000 customers, SMWD serves Coto de Caza, Ladera, Rancho Santa Margarita, Talega and a portion of Mission Viejo.

See www.smwd.com for the complete ordinance and information on rebates.