

Our View: We all have to pitch in during drought

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By the Editorial Board



Empty pool at Emanuel Medical Center in Turlock

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It's looking like a [long, hot summer](#) that starts today – and it's going to be even more parched if Californians don't get with the program.

[State officials reported this week](#) that residents and businesses are falling woefully short of the 20 percent water conservation goal in Gov. Jerry Brown's emergency drought declaration in January that [he reinforced in April](#). The statewide reduction was a pitiful 5 percent between January and May, compared to the same period the preceding three years.

Water agencies in Southern California and elsewhere, which have reduced per person water use with longstanding, robust conservation programs, can plausibly claim that it's more difficult for them to wring out more savings. Some officials argue that a blanket conservation target is unrealistic and unfair because of the different climate and vegetation across the state.

Still, everyone has to do their part for voluntary conservation to work.

[The State Water Resources Control Board](#) is starting to talk about stricter measures. Already, it has ordered 4,200 holders of “junior” water rights – those issued after 1914 – to stop drawing from many rivers and streams in the Central Valley, the first time that has happened since the severe drought of 1976-77. Correctly, its chairwoman said the board must prepare for worst-case scenarios of the drought continuing well into next year.

To pick the right solutions, the board needs to know the extent of the problem. The data it released this week are not definitive, compiled from surveys returned by just 270 of 443 water agencies across California. The board should heed the call for mandatory reporting of water production and consumption at least during the drought.

While big changes in how we use, and reuse, water may be in store in the longer term, there's no excuse for not saving as much as we can in the here and now. It's not that hard: taking shorter showers, making sure pipes aren't leaking, washing only full loads, reducing lawn irrigation times. You can even look into installing water efficient toilets, putting a rain barrel in the yard or taking advantage of rebates for replacing lawns with less thirsty landscaping.

Gallon by gallon, it all adds up.