

EDITORIAL: Water fines will help, but attitudes must change

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By The Bee Editorial Board



A house is reflected in a puddle of water from an irrigated front yard Wednesday, July 9, 2014, in San Diego. Wasting water outdoors amid the state's drought will begin hitting Californians in the wallet under new restrictions being proposed by state regulators, with fines of up to \$500 a day for overwatering front lawns or washing a car without a nozzle on the hose.

GREGORY BULL — AP Photo

We've all seen an overwatered lawn in Fresno and other cities with water flowing into the gutter. We shake our heads and ask: Don't they know we're in a severe drought?

Some cities have strict rules for people who waste water. Others have imposed mandatory cutbacks. But violators don't face serious consequences. Now, state water officials are proposing to change that laissez-faire mind-set. It's about time.

Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency in January and asked Californians to curb their water use by 20%. Statewide, residential users responded by cutting only 5%. In some parts of the state, water consumption increased. In which water-world are they living?

On Tuesday, the State Water Resources Control Board will consider emergency regulations that could lead to fines up to \$500 a day for people who obviously waste water.

Because many Californians haven't cut consumption, fines are a next logical step to impress upon people

how serious this drought is and that the state's water shortage could get worse.

To ratchet up the pressure to conserve, the proposal seeks to authorize local water agencies to levy fines for: 1) watering outdoor landscapes so heavily that it causes runoff; 2) washing vehicles with a hose not fitted with a shut-off nozzle; 3) washing sidewalks and driveways; and 4) using potable water in a fountain that does not have a re-circulation system.

"We're trying to deal with the fact that California is in this incredibly historic and severe drought and trying to figure out ways to increase our resilience and security," said Felicia Marcus, chair of the water board.

Many Californians are limiting their use. But not enough; more of us should be thinking about ways to arduously conserve by, for example, replacing lawns with drought-resistant plants.

This is the second time in two weeks that the State Water Resources Control Board has acted forcefully to deal with the drought. Last week the board streamlined a process to force some rural water users to stop drawing water from streams, or face \$500-per-day fines.

If the board approves the rules aimed at urban and suburban water users, authorities would instruct local water agencies to monitor water consumption and submit monthly reports. If anticipated levels of conservation are not met, more mandatory measures could be imposed.

Good. Some Californians evidently don't fully understand the severity of the drought. Perhaps fines of \$500 a day would help make it clear.

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