

Our View: Cutting water use will require real grass-roots effort

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Watering this lawn could now count as a violation, incurring big fines.

FILE — The Modesto Bee

Use a hose, go to jail. California hasn't quite come to threatening unrepentant water wasters with time behind bars, but emergency rules [adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board on Tuesday](#) take the state a lot closer to criminalizing the squandering of a precious resource.

We just hope it works.

[As a study by UC Davis](#) released Tuesday makes clear, the costs of this drought are severe. And in a region where so many jobs depend on agriculture, everyone is feeling the pain.

The state water boards rules require urban water agencies to crack down on water wasters. That means fining those who leave a hose running while washing a car, or who allow sprinklers to water the street or who use so much water it runs down the gutters. Repeat scofflaws could pay up to \$500 a day. Water agencies that fail to police their users could pay up to \$10,000 a day.



As severe as that sounds, it's nothing compared to the losses being suffered by farmers and those who depend on them. That UC Davis study pegged that cost at \$2.2 billion, or \$600,000 a day. So all things being equal, the urbanites are getting off easy.

We worry it won't be enough. As we said when the water board announced its proposal last week, many people have already taken most of the steps now being required. Lawns are going brown; cars are getting dustier; bricks are sitting in toilet tanks, and neighbors are dialing authorities when they see water being

wasted. It hasn't been enough.

Instead of falling, urban water has plateaued. San Francisco, one of the most conservation-minded cities anywhere, has only marginally reduced water use over last year. That's important, considering much of the Bay Area gets its water from the same river that Modesto and Turlock depend on.

In Southern California, Angelenos are using a lot less water than they did five years ago, but actually a little *more* than they did last year. And all of the additional water is coming out of the Delta because Los Angeles can no longer tap Owens Valley, which drained years ago and now must re-water.

Unfortunately, the highest urban use numbers come from right here in our valley, where we use 30 percent more water than do the average residents of Southern California. Much of it is tied to our lawns. So it's not a joke to say this will have to be a grass-roots effort.

But no matter what urban and suburban residents do, the largest water users in the state are farmers. Unfortunately, many have switched from pasture to trees that must be watered. This is increasing groundwater pumping. And while that isn't taking water out of reservoirs, it could very well leave us desperate if this drought continues for another year.

If that happens, what we've been asked to do this year will pale in comparison to what will be required to save our farms and jobs. Never mind the lawns.