

Wayne Kirkbride: In Southern California, they don't care about drought

By Wayne
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A sprinkler goes into action to water a lawn in California. Too many regions have failed to meet their water- reduction goals.

RICH PEDRONCELLI — The Associated Press

I might as well have been in Idaho or Utah, where plentiful rainfall has assured those citizens that water conservation is just a concept not pertinent to them.

But here I was in the city of La Mirada, in Los Angeles County, visiting relatives and becoming dismayed and angry at what I observed.

Among hundreds of tract homes was a sea of healthy, green lawns on display, some getting their usual watering during the heat of a summer day. An occasional front lawn had water running off and into the gutter.

At a practice for a high school football team, water lines ran freely from a leaking hose to provide drinking water to the players – and the run-off was onto an artificial turf, not even real grass that might have benefited.

As a resident of a Mother Lode town mired in regulations requiring mandatory water-use restrictions, I couldn't help but feel like proposing that California should be split into regions and governed according to their needs. I envisioned the squeeze being put on the delivery of water to Southern California via the State Water Project, finally waking up and shaking up the complacency that is all too prevalent in towns like La Mirada.

I've had to let my humble grass lawn die and I begin each shower with a bucket as a companion. Why aren't "they"

doing more to save water?

I contacted the city of La Mirada, and was referred to their code enforcement officer. I asked him what, if any, restrictions do the inhabitants of the city have as far as water use.

I was told that the only recent ordinance was the one updated in 2009 that required some measures on water conservation. It contained some of the same wording other communities have, such as the hours one may water a lawn (not from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.), but that's about all. There are two water suppliers for the city, neither of which have any authority to enforce the ordinance.

When asked who then would enforce the ordinance, I was told the water supplier would have to bounce it back to the city, and then, perhaps, the city would look into any violations. The code enforcement guy was not aware of any such action or any increase in water violations being reported.

The state has asked for only voluntary water savings from all citizens. But among my relatives, none was even aware of that mild request!

One of the water suppliers I looked up does have some water conservation rebates available, including a payment of \$3 per square foot for removing grass and replanting lawns with plants requiring less water.

La Mirada is not exceptional in its water use or seeming apathy toward conservation. The adjoining cities I saw all had the same lush lawns and shrubbery, as if the drought didn't exist.

Blame that mindset on local city governments for not doing more to educate their residents and, when necessary, enforce the rules by fines. As one Los Angeles Times writer editorialized, "We should not expect to be saved by sewage recycling, or desalinization or some miracle technology ..."

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