

# EDITORIAL: There's much more we can do to save water in the Valley

By The Fresno Bee Editorial Board

The message that California is in severe drought is being heard. But more must be done.

We are getting better at conserving water. Many lawns have turned brown. Many of us have put buckets in the shower to capture water for use on plants. Our cars are dirty. But mandatory cutbacks and threats of \$500 fines will go only so far.

What if very little rain falls this winter and snowfall is light in the Sierra? Are we ready to get extremely serious about conserving water?

Think about what it will look like if California experiences another dry winter and the drought churns into year four. There could be heated regional fights over water rights. Neighbors already are alerting the water police. What next? Night patrols for water wasters.

Thursday the National Weather Service reported drought conditions will persist in Northern and Central California, while the north coast and Southern California may get more precipitation.

In January, Gov. Jerry Brown called for a 20% reduction in water use. The State Water Resources Control Board made it a crime to waste water, with offenders subject to fines up to \$500 a day.

According to a report released last week by the water board, Californians cut water use by 4% in June, compared to a year ago; in July, there was a 7.5% decline. By August, the latest figures available, people had reduced usage by 11.5%.

Fresno residents are doing an even better job in cutting water consumption: drops of 7% in June, 8% in July and 16% in August.

Still, we all need to take additional steps to conserve water, and local government should do all it can to help. For example, Roseville and Sacramento offer rebates for low-flow toilets and high-efficiency sprinkler systems and washing machines.

Those cities also offer landscape rebates called "cash for grass." More than 550 people have replaced their lawns in Roseville, and the city has saved 45 million gallons of water.

City councils and mayors throughout the Valley should be brainstorming incentive programs and how to fund them. Water conservation must become a way of life — rain or no rain this winter.

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