

California water officials eye new restrictions in drought

By FENIT NIRAPPIL Associated Press

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As the California drought drags on, water officials are considering expanding mandatory outdoor water restrictions on homeowners and adding new limits on restaurants, hotels and decorative fountains.

At an informational meeting Tuesday, the State Water Resources Control Board also appeared ready to extend existing rules imposed last summer to boost water supplies.

That would mean Californians still won't be able to wash cars with hoses that don't shut off and must limit watering their lawns.

The emergency regulations also authorized agencies to fine water wasters up to \$500 a day, though such stringent enforcement has been rare.

Possible new rules under consideration include a ban on running outdoor water fountains and prohibiting lawn watering during cold and rainy periods.

"The key is to get away from very light mandatory restrictions," said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the board.

Other ideas presented Tuesday targeted businesses such as requiring restaurants to only serve water on request and telling hotels not to automatically provide guests with fresh towels and sheets every day. Some cities have similar rules already in place.

The board has considered making some water restrictions permanent with the prospect of future droughts looming.

"We definitely need permanent regulations," said Frances Spivy-Weber, the board vice-chairwoman. "I just don't see how we can enter the next 30 years with climate change without them."

The board has the power to define unreasonable water use. That power can also be used to ban golf course and cemetery owners from using drinking water to maintain landscapes when recycled water is available, but Marcus said the board isn't targeting those areas now.

The board could consider the extension of restrictions next month and take up other possible regulations later in the year.