

State sets Fresno target for water cuts at 28%

A drip irrigation spray emitter waters a drought-tolerant plant in a Fresno yard.

JOHN WALKER — Fresno Bee file photo [Buy Photo](#)

- Valley water cutbacks

District	Gallons*	Cut
Reedley	126.9	24%
Fresno City	150.7	28%
Sanger	153.6	28%
Dinuba	172.3	32%
Madera City	173.5	32%
Porterville	182.0	32%
Selma	189.2	32%
Visalia	191.7	32%
Hanford	193.7	32%
Lemoore	198.9	32%
Tulare City	214.8	32%
Kerman	217.9	36%
Exeter	218.8	36%
Corcoran	223.7	36%
Clovis	235.2	36%
Los Banos	253.0	36%
Merced	298.8	36%
Bakman Water Co.	302.2	36%
Madera County	328.1	36%



Source: [State Water Resources Board \(click here to read the full list\)](#)

*Gallons per capita

SACRAMENTO — Water use must plummet in each California community under Gov. Jerry Brown's sweeping plan to get through a relentless drought, but regulators on Saturday offered some cities relief from drastic cuts.

Brown this month ordered a 25% cutback in statewide urban water use. The agencies expected to make the steepest cuts have said the state's demands are unreasonable and unfair.

[The water board on Saturday released new mandatory conservation targets](#) from 8% to 36% compared with 2013 levels, before the governor declared a drought emergency. The targets are now assigned based on water use last summer to reward communities that already started making cutbacks after the drought started.

Some communities are expected to save even more water, including Fresno, which must scale back by 28%.

At the high end of the cutback scale are 36%ers Bakman Water Co. (which serves part of southeast Fresno), Clovis, Corcoran, Exeter, Kerman, Kingsburg, Madera County and Merced city. For Clovis, the mandate is a percentage point higher than what was expected when Brown announced earlier this month that the cutbacks were coming.

Visalia and Hanford, two cities that were expecting 35%, instead are being asked to do 32%.

Others have easier targets: Los Angeles and San Diego must cut 16%. Reedley, at 24%, has it the "easiest" in the central San Joaquin Valley.

The updated regulations still didn't address some of the most common complaints from agencies.

Communities that slashed water consumption before the drought are grouped together with those who didn't. Water savings can be limited by factors unrelated to good conservation, including hotter weather, fiercer winds and economic growth. And some say regulators are ignoring local efforts to wean off the state water system and prepare for droughts, such as paying for desalination plants and local reservoirs.

The board on Saturday also allowed water departments to exclude deliveries to farms when determining water cutbacks. Marcus acknowledged that the move would likely exacerbate the perception that agriculture, which uses four times as much as urban users, is exempt from drought cuts.

Regulators are facing backlash as they try to figure out how to distribute the burden of conservation. It's not feasible to expect coastal cities with few lawns like San Francisco to make cuts on the same magnitude as resort towns in the desert. But the state also risks flaring up regional tensions surrounding how water is delivered in California.

"All Californians need to step up more and prepare as if it won't rain or snow much next year either," said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the State Water Resources Control Board.

"There are parts of the state that really haven't done much of anything," said John Helminski, assistant director of San Diego public utilities.

He said San Diego residents are being asked to endure new restrictions even though they have been paying higher rates to become more self-reliant for water, such as an upcoming project to purify sewage into drinking water.

"The fact that we are being dinged additional costs doesn't seem fair."

The board on Saturday said these concerns are valid but more appropriate for permanent conservation goals.

"All of those projects are in the long-term interests of the communities, but what we are talking about here is a short-term emergency," said Marcus, the chairwoman.

The regulations are expected to be approved by the board in early May and take effect in June.

Local water departments that fail to conserve or reduce water use face possible fines and state intervention, which could include raising water rates and adding new water restrictions. State officials said they will start monitoring for compliance this summer but will remain focused on helping local agencies rather than penalizing them.

“Fines don’t create water,” said Caren Trgovcich, the board’s chief deputy director.

Some communities that aren’t importing water and aren’t facing shortages, particularly on the North Coast, can petition to make just a 4% cut.

Farms have endured cutbacks from government reservoir systems, and many are likely to be ordered to stop diverting water from streams and rivers they have legal rights to take as early as next week.

The Fresno Bee contributed to this report.