

Bill Would Require Water Submeters On New Apartments

California lawmakers are considering a bill that would require the installation of water meters in each unit of newly constructed apartments.

Democratic Senator Lois Wolk is author of the proposed legislation. She says almost half of all Californians live in multi-family housing. Fewer than 20-percent ever see a water bill.

"The most efficient way of gaining conservation is a price mechanism," says Wolk. "When people see what they use, and if it's too much, they'll cut back."

Debra Carlton with the California Apartment Association supports the idea of submeters. She says making sure water is conserved is just as difficult for property owners.

"You can ask a tenant all day long to conserve, but they actually don't know what they should be doing, or even if what they are doing is beneficial if they don't receive a bill," says Carlton.

Similar legislation has failed in the past. Carlton says the reasons are complex. Water utility companies often don't have the manpower to install the large number of submeters that would be required. Currently property owners usually turn to private companies. There are also liability and fairness complications that need to be resolved.

"Not only are we dealing with the standards for installation in new apartments, but it also brings in the tenant organizations who want to make sure that whatever rules are in place are fair and balanced," says Steve Carlson with the Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles.

But supporters of the bill are hoping the severity of the drought will change the measure's fate this session.