

# California government says it's meeting water-saving goal

By FENIT NIRAPPIL and JUSTIN PRITCHARD

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California's state government reported meeting its own overall water conservation goal for 2014, though data released Wednesday showed half the agencies fell short of the 20 percent target while the drought worsened.

Last year, Gov. Jerry Brown set the savings goal for homeowners, businesses and local governments — as well as state offices, prisons, parks and work crews.

Inmates began taking shorter showers, sprinklers at state buildings stopped, leaks were found and fixed, and vehicle fleets went unwashed.

Overall, state agencies used 23 percent less water last year compared to 2013, according to data from the Department of General Services, which is helping coordinate the state's drought response.

But while half of the 32 agencies in the data met the 20 percent conservation goal, half fell short, including four that actually used more water in 2014.

Overall, water use fell from 19.4 billion gallons in 2013 to 14.9 billion gallons in 2014, according to the data. Caltrans, which minimized watering on enough roadside land to cover 22,000 football fields, accounted for more than half of the total water savings.

The largest water user, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, cut 15 percent, according to the data. A spokesman did not return a call and email seeking comment.

"It's our goal to lead by example," said Brian Ferguson, a spokesman for the Department of General Services. He also acknowledged that agencies must do more.

"There is still room for improvement," Ferguson said. "As the drought worsens it is incumbent on all departments to take additional steps to ensure they are reducing their water use."

A review last summer by The Associated Press found few departments had started tracking conservation efforts, and many that did not were not meeting the 20 percent target.

The state's wild land firefighting agency, CalFire, had the largest increase at 50 percent — from 88.5 million gallons in 2013 to 132.5 million gallons in 2014.

The agency fought 1,000 more wildfires last year and hired hundreds of additional firefighters and support staff who also use water at base camps, CalFire spokesman Daniel Berlant said.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife conserved only 7 percent, which spokeswoman Jordan Traverso attributed to a possible leak or meter error at a facility near Sacramento.

Use was flat at Department of Justice crime laboratories. Spokeswoman Kristin Ford said water is necessary for critical functions including DNA tests.

Conservation also varies widely across California communities. Only 33 of 411 local agencies that report monthly water use to state regulators said their customers cut more than 20 percent compared to 2013, according to data published by the State Water Resources Control Board.

Earlier this month, as a survey showed historically low levels of snow in the Sierra Nevada that provides one-third of the state's water, Brown turned what had been a voluntary 20 percent cut into a mandatory 25 percent reduction, causing outcry from some who believe the cuts are too severe.

Among the critics was the Fair Oaks Water District in suburban Sacramento which said Wednesday that the state is illegally taking water if it forces mandatory savings to redirect water to agencies that didn't prepare for the drought.

The water board says its proposed reduction targets for communities are legal under emergency authorization granted by lawmakers.

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Pritchard contributed from Los Angeles.

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