

Gov. Brown proposes \$10,000 fine for worst water wasters

By FENIT NIRAPPIL and JULIET WILLIAMS

Gov. Jerry Brown responds to a reporter's question after a meeting with businesses affected by the drought at his Capitol office in Sacramento, Calif., on April 16. Cities expected to slash water use in the drought are revolting against Brown's mandatory water restrictions, and dozens of agencies are telling water regulators that their assigned water use targets are unrealistic and unfair.

RICH PEDRONCELLI — AP

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Gov. Jerry Brown on Tuesday called for \$10,000 fines for residents and businesses that waste the most water as California cities try to meet mandatory conservation targets during the drought.

The recommendation was part of a legislative proposal Brown said he would make to expand enforcement of water restrictions.

His announcement came as his administration faces skepticism about his a sweeping plan to save water and just hours before regulators were scheduled to release an updated plan assigning each community an updated water use reduction target.

"We've done a lot. We have a long way to go," Brown said after meeting with the mayors of 14 cities, including San Diego and Oakland. "So maybe you want to think of this as just another installment on a long enterprise to live with a changing climate and with a drought of uncertain duration."

The governor also said he is directing state agencies to speed up environmental review of projects that increase local water supplies. Mayors have complained that such projects have been delayed by red tape.

A legislative panel on Monday rejected a bill supported by Republicans to speed construction of new water storage projects.

Last summer, state regulators authorized \$500 fines for outdoor water waste, but few cities have levied such high amounts. Many agencies have said they would rather educate customers than penalize them.

The mayors who gathered Tuesday with Brown did not indicate that they were seeking higher fines.

Brown said steep fines should still be a last resort and "only the worst offenders" that continually violated water rules would be subject to \$10,000 penalties.

His proposal would also provide enforcement power to water departments that currently can't fine customers.

California is in its fourth year of drought, and state officials fear it may last as long as a decade.

Earlier this month, Brown ordered a mandatory 25 percent reduction in statewide water use in cities and towns after



voluntary conservation wasn't enough to meet his goals.

Some cities and agencies say conservation targets ranging up to 36 percent are unrealistic and possibly illegal. The State Water Resources Control Board plans to vote on regulations next week.

Earlier this month, an appeals court struck down tiered water rates designed to encourage conservation in the Orange County city of San Juan Capistrano, saying rates must be linked to the cost of service.

Brown said the ruling does not apply universally, but it does cause problems for regulators pushing conservation.

Brown did not release any specific language related to his proposed legislation, and it was unclear whether the Democratic governor had asked any lawmakers to carry it.

Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins, D-San Diego, was not aware of Brown's proposal and did not have an immediate comment, her spokesman John Casey said. Claire Conlon, a spokeswoman for Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles, also declined immediate comment.