

# Water Conservation Leads To Unexpected Outcomes

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Calwater meets with residents of Selma

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Cities across the valley are working to cut their water use under new regulations as the state struggles through its fourth year of drought. However, the reductions are having different effects in different towns, in some cases having unexpected repercussions.

Towns throughout the Valley are having to take a hard look at their water use in order to meet Governor Jerry Brown's ambitious conservation order.

In some cases reducing use by as much as a third.

One of those is Selma.

At a recent meeting in the Town, Calwater district manager Scott Bailey addresses a group of about 30 residents on steps they can take to reduce their water use.

Bailey says their goal is to work with people rather than come in simply with fines and penalties.

"People are confused and they are looking at how it is going to affect them. And so once they hear our message and the tools that we have and that it is not just going to be enforcement, and restrictions and we want to fine you. We want to help you be successful because if you are successful we are successful," Bailey said.

"Our estimate is that lost revenues will be somewhere between \$500-and-\$600-million dollars," Max Gohmberg, Water Resources Control Board

It's a message that resonates with Gilbert Orosco, who says he is already taking steps to limit his use including turning off his irrigation and telling his family to take shorter showers.

"I haven't let me grass die like some other folks but it is going to get to that point. And I am ready. As soon as the good people of Selma say that is it. Then that's it," Orosco said. Orosco said.

But if the conservation efforts are successful, it puts water utilities in a tight spot.

Less water means less money to run and maintain the system.

Max Gohmberg with the Water Resources Control Board says companies and public utilities stand to lose hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Over the nine months that these regulations will be in effect, our estimate is that lost revenues will be somewhere between 5-and-600 million dollars," Gohmberg said.

Gohmberg says the board understands that raising rates in response to conservation demands is upsetting to consumers, but that for too long water in California has been sold at rates below what it costs to produce.

That has some utilities in the valley taking a hard look at their rates.

"We are paying enough, I believe. And it is hard enough to get by now without raising them higher," Iris O'Daniels, Hanford

One of those towns in the city of Hanford.

Deputy Public Works director John Doyle says just because people are using less water, the infrastructure needed to pump and deliver that water does not get any less expensive.

"If you conserve 28-percent of your water that means 28 percent of your revenue is gone. But it still takes staff to pump the water out of the ground, and check the wells, and fix leaks, exercise water valves, and flush fire hydrants. It takes staff to check the water quality is adequate for our residents," Doyle said.

Doyle says Hanford is also being forced by the state to chlorinate their water, an 800-thousand dollar expense that further burdens rates.

The majority of their customers are on meters and Doyle says rates will likely go up 25-percent but that the average customer only pays about 20-dollars a month currently.

Sitting near a fountain in Hanford's town square is 70-year old Iris O'Daniels who says any increase would be unfair especially to low or fixed income residents like her.

"I would like them to leave them as they are. Because we are paying enough, I believe. And it is hard enough to get by now without raising them higher," O'Daniels said.

Calwater, which provides water to several Valley towns, could consider raising rates later this summer.

Statewide public utilities are being required to reduce water consumption by 25-percent compared to 20-13 levels.