

## Editorial: All cities must put in water meters

By The Bee Editorial Board

Valley cities — from the biggest to the smallest — have no excuse for not having water meters by now.

Water is no different than gasoline or electricity: Consumers should pay for precisely what they use, especially during this historic drought.

But here in the Valley (and other parts of California), elected officials have been reluctant to install meters out of fear that ratepayers would vote them out of office in retaliation for making them bear the cost of the new infrastructure and charging for their exact consumption.

No one likes to pay more for anything. But by failing to act on water meters, Valley communities are driving up installation costs and continuing to encourage people to use more water than they need.

And there's no getting around this fact: When water providers charge flat rates, those people who treat water as a finite, precious resource — which it is — are forced to subsidize those ratepayers who take long showers, water their lawns every day and wash their cars with nozzle-less hoses.

The evidence shows that when people are charged for the water they use, they use less water because they waste less water.

As reported by The Bee's Lew Griswold, overall per capita use dropped 22% in Fresno after the city underwent a five-year meter installation effort ending last year. In Visalia, household water use dropped 17% after meters were put in.

And Chowchilla Public Works Director Craig Locke points to another benefit of modern water meters: They detect evidence of leaks. Because people on meters pay for what they use, they are motivated to repair broken pipes, constantly running toilets and leaky faucets.

California's drought has put great attention on water consumption by everyone: households, manufacturers, businesses and farmers.

Among the mandates triggered by the drought was Gov. Brown's order this spring that statewide usage be cut 25%. Here in the Valley, where many people have taken water for granted, the State Water Resources Control Board has ordered cities to reduce consumption 28% to 34%.

Meeting these orders will be difficult in communities that have been slow to install meters.

One of them is Corcoran, which is 50% unmetered. According to Corcoran City Manager Kindon Meik, the town's city council "hasn't felt the need to put a burden on the ratepayer" and thus it isn't planning to install more meters. To say that the Corcoran City Council doesn't understand the magnitude of the drought is an understatement.

One way or another, water meters are coming. By state law, all urban water hookups must be metered by 2025.

Those cities dragging their heels are increasing installation costs with the passing of every month — and encouraging the waste of more water.

Bluntly put, they are acting irresponsibly.

