

# Officials shred Hanford #1 drought ranking

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The headline last week was enough to make Hanford residents quake in their shoes: “9 Cities Running Out of Water.” Sure enough, there was Hanford in the worst slot on the list.

The 24/7 Wall St. report, posted June 16, claimed that Hanford “is tied with Merced, Modesto and Fresno for the worst drought conditions in the nation.”

That dramatic claim generated a lot of cyberspace traffic.

The original story got 737 Facebook likes. After it was reprinted in USA Today on June 17, it picked up a lot more steam — 3,961 Facebook likes, 230 tweets and 77 comments.

It popped up on local readers’ news feeds. Kings County resident Angelita Castaneda posted the following comment on the Sentinel’s Facebook page: “Don’t you think The Sentinel should be reporting more about this?”

In a sarcastic tweet, Tim Lyon said, “We’re #1! Hanford worst city in USA for drought & bad air!”

The story refers to a “recent report from the American Lung Association” that lists Hanford air as among the worst in the nation. The report said drought “has impacted the region’s air quality.”

All of this left officials wondering how 24/7 Wall St. came up with its ranking.

“I’m not sure where they got their facts, because they didn’t consult with the city,” said Public Works Director Lou Camara. “No, we’re not running out of water.”

On the 24/7 Wall St. website, the only contact provided is a P.O. Box in New York City. Thomas Frohlich, the author of the piece, is listed as a senior features editor, but no phone number is listed for him — or for anybody else.

The report appears to rely on the U.S. Drought Monitor, a collaboration between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

As of June 16, the Drought Monitor classified 46.7 percent of California as being in “exceptional drought” — the worst category.

Most of the Central Valley — and virtually all of the San Joaquin Valley — is in the “exceptional drought” category. That may explain why the nine cities listed by the report as “running out of water” are all in the Central Valley.

“We’re not running out of water now,” said Camara. “The article made it sound like we’re in dire straits. That’s not the case.”

Camara said the Valley still has a “several hundred years supply of water beneath our feet.”

Hanford City Manager Darrel Pyle said there’s no evidence that Hanford is in any greater danger than surrounding

municipalities affected by the same drought.

“We’re pulling water from very deep aquifers,” Pyle said, listing Hanford’s well depths as between 900 feet and 1,100 feet. Pyle said that city officials would require residents to conserve more water if the city was about to run out.

The 24/7 Wall St. article stated that Hanford earlier this month adopted additional restrictions “such as barring serving of water at restaurants other than by request as well as vehicle and driveway washing bans.”

There is a driveway washing ban in place in the city. There is no ban on washing vehicles, but residents are required to use a spray nozzle with an automatic shut-off valve.

Other Kings County cities have similar requirements in place.

According to Camara, the restaurant water rule was imposed statewide by the State Water Resources Control Board.

“It’s, again, more national reporting where I’m not sure where they’re getting information to write a story,” he said. “To me, that’s poor journalism.”

Which doesn’t mean local residents have nothing to worry about.

Hanford is under a mandate to achieve a 28 percent reduction in water use compared to 2013. In May, the city managed only a 14 percent savings.

Officials hope it comes out better at the end of June.

“This month is going to be a challenge,” Camara said, adding that triple-digit temperatures are “not going to help the situation.”

“I think if we’ve done as good as a lot of other San Joaquin Valley [cities], it’s going to be pretty tough for the state to single out Hanford,” Pyle said.

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