

Drought tops Bay Area residents' list of concerns, poll finds

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California's drought surged to the top of Bay Area residents' concerns, ahead of housing prices and the general high cost of living here, clogged commutes and crime in a new poll released Wednesday.

The issue didn't crack the top three last year, but the 2015 survey by Bay Area Council Poll shows the state's long-term drought is changing residents' thinking. The poll found that 48 percent of residents heavily favor expanding the use of recycled water, turning seawater into drinking water, and building dams and reservoirs.

The annual poll was conducted online by the Oakland public opinion firm [EMC Research](#), which surveyed more than 1,000 residents. It has a margin of error rate of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

While 89 percent of respondents said preparing for the drought is an important priority for the region, they said they're already doing all they can to save water and appeared weary of restricting their water use and raising rates — particularly in San Francisco.

Only in San Francisco did the drought take second to housing costs as the leading problem. The cost of living and housing prices were among the other concerns in Bay Area counties, followed by such issues as traffic, crime and the job market.

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San Francisco residents, compared with those in other counties, had the highest opinion of themselves when it came to their water-saving efforts.

Among San Franciscans, 47 percent said they were doing everything they can to conserve, and 31 percent said they could do a little more. In Alameda County, just 33 percent of respondents were maxed out trying to save water, and 47 percent said they could boost their conservation efforts.

By age, conservation opinions also differed. Among those over 65, 42 percent of residents said they could be saving more. The poll found just 35 percent of Millennials — those born in the 1980s through the early 2000s — felt the same.

Raising water rates was clearly an unpopular approach, with just 7 percent strongly favoring and 24 percent somewhat favoring increases. In the poll, 63 percent supported building new dams and reservoirs, and 75 percent supported expanding seawater desalination efforts.

Desalination has emerged as a promising yet controversial technology to bring new sources of water to California, a state in the midst of a fourth straight year of drought. Critics cite environmental drawbacks such as harm to marine life, the high cost of building these plants and the potential for mixed success.

Several bills are working their way through the Legislature to help build new dams and reservoirs, but that effort is

also fraught with controversy with some questioning whether there are enough good sites left for these projects or if the approach can effectively address the state's water problem.

On a different issue, nearly half of the poll respondents believed the Bay Area's economy has improved over the last six months, but their confidence levels have fallen since last year. Thirty-nine percent said they expected the economy to improve over the next six months, a 12-point drop from last year.

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