

Fresno's watering fines fall in July

By Marc Benjamin
mbenjamin@fresnobee.com

Watering penalties in Fresno were down in July with 1,008 fines issued, but officials expect an increase in August.

A large number of staff vacations last month was likely the leading cause in the nearly 43 percent reduction in fines, which totaled \$45,360, said city spokesman Mark Standriff.

Staff on vacation meant fewer city employees on patrol for water violators.

During June, 1,761 Fresno water customers were fined, totaling \$79,245. There were 1,204 citations and \$54,180 in fines issued in May, he said.

The \$45 water penalties are charged to customers found watering on incorrect days. The city gives warnings before fines.

During July, the city reported 2,399 customer contacts, down from 3,992 for June.

"The better we do in identifying the folks who are watering on days they shouldn't be, the more it helps in the overall reduction in consumption," Standriff said.

In Fresno, water consumption dropped 31 percent in July, Standriff said. The city is mandated by the state to cut consumption by 28 percent, he said. Fresno officials reported a 30 percent water consumption reduction in June.

Last week, Clovis reported exceeding its state-mandated goal of 36 percent by cutting water consumption 36.3 percent for July. Water use must be cut from the amount used for the same month in 2013.

Fines for residents amounted to \$144,060, up from \$125,197 in June.

First-time fines for residential users were \$25. Other residential users were fined \$12.50 under a complicated, sliding-scale formula, in which they don't meet the 36 percent cut but use less than the average household. Average household use changes each month.

Second-offense fines for residential users in Clovis are \$50 per customer.

Clovis bills every two months and has about 27,000 customers. With the 6,460 customers fined in July, the city has fined more than 40 percent of its customers during its first full billing cycles.

Of those fined, 6,173 — more than 95 percent — were residential customers.

Of the residential customers penalized, about 3,900 were \$25 fines and another 2,260 were at the reduced level of \$12.50.

Marc Benjamin: 559-441-6166, @beebenjamin