

Clovis watering fines exceed \$227,000 in August

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Fines for Clovis residents not meeting state water-consumption rules shot up in August to \$227,882, city officials said.

In the three months the state mandates have been in effect, the city has fined water customers nearly \$500,000. The city fines customers for not meeting the state-mandated 36 percent cut.

Fines in Clovis for June and July totaled \$269,257. In August, the first month that \$50 fines were levied against second-time offenders, fines went up more than 50 percent from July.

In July, the city cut water use 36.3 percent, slightly better than the percentage mandated by the state. In August, the city reduced water consumption by 32.5 percent. City officials said residents used less water in August 2013 than in July 2013, which made it more difficult to reach the state's mandate. The mandated cut is based on a comparison of consumption in 2013 and this year.

The city issued more than \$162,812 in penalties to residents. Commercial, industrial and other users were fined \$65,070. Customers in Clovis are billed every other month.

The city fines are included in customers' bills. First-time fines for residential users are \$25. There were 1,920 such fines issued in August. Second-time fines for residential users are \$50, which is also the maximum fine. In August, 2,621 customers were fined \$50.

There is an additional fine of \$12.50 that is levied based on a complicated, sliding-scale formula applied to residents who don't meet the 36 percent cut but use less than the average household. There were 681 fines in August for customers in that category.

The amount of water used as the year continues will decrease as landscape irrigation phases out in the fall and winter, which means there will be fewer ways to meet the 36 percent cut for that time of year, city officials say.

That means that as the year goes on, the number of fines could increase, said Lisa Koehn, assistant public utilities director in Clovis.

"I think it's going to get worse," she said. "Some people are just ignoring it, and those are the ones we'd probably like to focus on."

She said the number of customer water-use audits has increased exponentially and the city continues to have a backlog.

"There are a lot more than we ever had before," she said.

In Fresno, 799 fines – totaling \$35,955 – were issued in August. Fresno's fine is \$45 for residents who water on incorrect days or on no-watering days: Monday, Thursday and Friday.

Fresno's fines went down because employee vacations and the shifting of an enforcement team member to the rebate program led to an enforcement reduction, said Mark Standriff, a city spokesman.

The city issued 1,008 citations in July, 1,761 in June and 1,204 in May, documents show.

Standriff said the city likely will reach a record in fines this year, exceeding the 2012 mark of 7,562. So far this year, Fresno has issued 5,811 fines.

In addition, Fresno city employees already have reached out to 17,211 water customers who were not fined for watering incorrectly, which far exceeds the 12,909 customers who were counseled and not fined last year.

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