

Many Valley water agencies fall short of goals in August

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Californians beat the state's mandates for water conservation in August – barely.

Urban water use fell by 26.9 percent compared with August 2013, a conservation rate that was lower than July's but still higher than the 25 percent requirement set by Gov. Jerry Brown, the State Water Resources Control Board announced Thursday.

The results mean Californians have beaten the statewide mandate during each of the first three months of mandatory cutbacks ordered by the governor. Savings have averaged 28.7 percent since the cutbacks went into effect June 1.

Drought regulators said they were generally pleased with the results, although the savings rate for August wasn't as impressive as the 31.4 percent in July. Board Chair Felicia Marcus said a spell of rainy weather in Southern California in July made it easier to conserve water that month, and she thinks water users aren't backsliding.

"People get it," she said on a conference call with reporters. "In a crisis, people pull together and they hang in there."

Most central San Joaquin Valley water agencies fell short of their state conservation goals in August, officials said, though Selma, Kingsburg, Merced and Bakman Water Co., which serves an area southeast of Fresno, achieved their goals.

Fresno came close, reducing water consumption by 27.5 percent compared to August 2013 – half a percent short of its 28 percent goal.

Some water providers, however, fell far short of the state-mandated conservation standard.

At 15.6 percent, Lemoore's reduction was less than half of what the state sought – 32 percent. Hanford was even worse – just 5.7 percent versus a goal of 28 percent.

Hanford, which is among the lowest-performing communities in water conservation under the state's rules, was the only Central Valley city issued a compliance order by the State Water Resources Control Board. Hanford was one of eight cities statewide to receive a compliance order.

Lou Camara, the city's public works director, said Hanford was expecting it.

The city will improve conservation by raising rates to encourage conservation, update bills to make them easier for customers to understand and improve public awareness and outreach by adding booths at local shopping malls to make residents more aware of conservation.

For about 25 years, Camara said, the city has made efforts to reduce water consumption, which means Hanford was starting at a lower consumption level than other cities that only recently began conserving. Since 2013, the city's water consumption has increased because of new commercial projects and the addition of three subdivisions and a school outside the city limits into the city's water system. He said Kings County Jail and a local hospital also expanded and the city has added commercial centers.

In Sacramento, where residents woke up to wet pavement, Marcus warned Californians against becoming complacent about water use. She was particularly worried about residents overreacting to forecasts of a [significant](#)

[El Niño winter](#). She noted forecasters have said the storms could fall mainly in Southern California, bypassing the north state.

“We can have floods in Southern California and continuing drought in Northern and Central California,” Marcus said. “We’re still on the ‘better safe than sorry’ plan.”

The mandatory cutbacks are scheduled to end next February, and officials said it will be tougher to achieve year-over-year savings in the winter, when most water use is indoors.

Across the state, 291 out of 411 districts have met their targets or come within 1 percent of doing so. Another 55 districts are within 5 percent of compliance.

Brown’s order is designed to save 1.2 million acre-feet of water by February. So far the savings have totaled 611,000 acre-feet. An acre-foot is 326,000 gallons, roughly a year’s water supply for a typical household.

The Bee’s Marc Benjamin contributed to this report.