

# Clovis to stop handing out fines for excessive water use

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Clovis City Council members will stop fining residents at the end of this month for using too much water.

In addition, council members voted 4-0 to increase awareness of conservation programs using money from the fines, and reduce landscape watering to one day per week beginning Nov. 1.

City staff recommended that the council suspend the fines, change watering rules and improve education and outreach programs with a portion of money from fines already collected. The fines were prompted by state rules that require Clovis to reduce water consumption by 36 percent. City officials may need to use the lion's share of the fines to pay the state for failing to meet the 36 percent mandate.

The city's average reduction in the first three months of the mandate has been about 33.3 percent. About 35 percent of the city's customers were fined during the three-month period.

The state mandate was passed on to city water customers. Residential water users were fined in ever-increasing amounts of \$12.50, \$25 and \$50 if they failed to cut 36 percent of their consumption beginning in June. Other water customers also paid fines but at different levels depending on their use.

"A lot of people have sacrificed," said Mayor Nathan Magsig. "The public has done a fantastic job."

The city has collected nearly \$500,000 in fines and projects adding another \$250,000 in September, according to city officials, although the amount is not yet known.

33.3 percent

The amount Clovis has cut water use since June

The fines were meant as an incentive for residents to save water, said Luke Serpa, Clovis' public works director.

A significant reason for suspending fines is they're less likely to be effective as residents start cutting back outdoor watering in cooler fall and winter months, he said.

The next round of bills that go out in the mail will be the last ones including fines, Serpa said.

Even with the penalties suspended, the state's mandate continues, he said.

Under the city's new plan, watering will go from twice to once a week, beginning Nov. 1. The city also will use \$25,000 from the fines for education and public outreach programs.

The remaining fine money will be used to offset the shortfall in the city's operations budget due to customers using less water. Some of that money also could be used to pay any state fines for not meeting the 36 percent mandate.

City reports indicate that reduced revenue resulting from conservation efforts have cost the city \$1.28 million, not including September. Serpa predicts the shortfall for September will be about \$400,000.

He said the city has \$1 million available that was set aside to buy water if the city had to use its water bank. It didn't need to use the money last year or this year, which could help make up the city's revenue shortfall.

Few residents spoke to the council Monday night and they favored the city's action.

"I understand the city had no choice but to take these actions," said Clovis resident Robert Evans. "I think the city did a great job, but it's unfortunate the city had to do what it had to do."

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