

# City Hall will soon tell Fresno: Here's how we got into this mess

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My prediction: Fresno City Hall in the next 48 hours will call a news conference to announce big changes to landscape watering rules.

City officials have a lot explaining to do. Knowing them as I do, they'll want to be ahead of the game.

As we all know, there's a drought. Sacramento has ordered Fresno to cut its water consumption by 28%.

You know what? We're right on track.

Fresno in June, July, August and September has cut its consumption by exactly 28% from the same four-month period in 2013.

All Fresno has to do is cut its consumption by 28% in each of the next five months: October, November, December, January and February.

If we do that, Sacramento will leave us alone for awhile. If we don't, we could be hit with huge fines.

You might ask: What's the big deal? As they say on Wall Street, the trend is your friend. Our trend line is 28%. We're all in the mood to conserve. Therefore, the future is full of 28% monthly reductions, right?

Maybe. But probably not.

City Hall is asking Fresnoans to voluntarily reduce their weekly landscaping watering to one day a week. That might become mandatory.

Fresno to hit this goal of a 28% water cut over nine months would have to use 10.1 billion fewer gallons of water.

According to city figures, Fresno in the previous four months we saved 6,173,869,448 gallons.

Fresno in the next five months must save 3,932,583,200 gallons to hit the magic 28% figure for the full nine months.

But, strange as it sounds, the hot weather was Fresno's secret weapon in this battle. It's always been hot in the Valley. Fresnoans have always loved their lawns and gardens. Fresnoans have always watered their personal green space during the hot weather.

At one point, the city was going to stop all landscape watering beginning Dec. 1. Then the council some months changed that to one day a week. City officials might return to the original rule.

City Hall allowed Fresnoans to water their landscaping three days a week in 2013.

City Hall has since cut that limit to two days a week. If Fresnoans in 2015 watered their landscaping in the same manner as they did in 2013, but did so one-third less often during the week (two days per week rather than three days per week), then the city would generate huge water savings.

Fresno during June through September 2013 used 22,063,264,448 gallons. One-third of that is about 7.35 billion gallons — nearly three-quarters of the 10.1 billion gallons the city must save over the nine months. (I'm assuming here we also took shorter showers, etc. Indoor use is a fraction of the outdoor use.)

Instead, we saved 6.17 billion gallons. We came up 1.18 billion gallons short of what (unofficially) was our logical goal.

Well, we've still got five months to catch up, right? Right.

Officials in the Swearingin Administration met Monday to discuss water-conservation strategy. It's almost certain City Hall will take a closer look at computers recording daily use by Fresno's 110,000 single-family residential accounts.

But the next five months are relatively cool to cold months. We pray that the rains come long, hard, consistent beginning about Oct. 22 and lasting until about April 29.

My point: Even in drought years, we water our landscaping far less in the winter months.

So, as we've seen, a modest change in our watering patterns (two days a week rather than three) during the hot months resulted in big (though not big enough) savings.

Going forward, we need to save 3,932,583,200 gallons over the next five months. But our chances for saving those gallons simply by cutting back on our landscape watering are slim to none. As I've said, we simply don't water that much during that time. There's less "fat" to cut.

Now, if we had cut our water consumption in each of the four hot months as perhaps we should have, we would have saved 1.18 billion more gallons than we actually did. Therefore, the number of gallons we would need to save for the upcoming five months would be 2.75 billion, not 3.93 billion.

In other words, our water-saving burden would have been 30% less than what it's actually going to be.

Fresno hasn't gone the route of fines as much as Clovis to spur conservation. Short of a miracle, that's about to change. Also, the city might limit consumers to a certain length of time for landscape watering, and use their computers to check on who's obeying the rules.

But, for whatever reasons, we didn't save in the four hot months as we should have. The irony, of course, is that we hit the 28% goal right on the mark, yet we failed.

Hence, my prediction of a real quick City Hall news conference. The administration of Mayor Ashley Swearingin and seven council members must explain what we're going to do for the next five months and, just as importantly, how we got into this mess.

Accountability is the word.

Maybe that news conference will come Tuesday.

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