

Successful Strategies for Conservation

California city implements restrictions to meet water reduction goals



San Jose uses signage to indicate where recycled water is used for irrigation to alleviate residents' concerns that water is being wasted.

By Emily Kurth

With California experiencing its fourth year of severe drought, the need to save water remains a top priority for local and statewide agencies. Throughout 2015, California's annual rainfall has been critically below average, and that includes the state's third largest city, San Jose.

In the Sierra Nevada, the source of half of San Jose's water, the snow pack measurement in April was only 6% of average levels. Locally, the groundwater level fell about 5 to 25 ft lower than the previous year.

As in all major cities with a population of more than 1 million, San Jose's businesses and residents represent a large amount of water use; however, this also means that cities like San Jose are well positioned to create opportunities for water savings because of the chance for widespread community participation.

Statewide Regulations Expand

The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), charged with preserving California's water resources, first called for

a 20% water reduction goal in response to the drought in 2014. With the drought far from over by the spring of 2015, SWRCB expanded the regulations further on March 17. This expansion required the state of California to reduce water use by 25%. Along with conservation targets for individuals, the new emergency regulations also incorporated mandates for water suppliers to create outdoor water restrictions for their customers and set specific requirements for each city to meet. The state gave San Jose a 20% water conservation goal.

In encouraging water conservation efforts as the front line against the drought, SWRCB indicated that conservation is the most efficient, cost-effective way to save water. The board also encouraged residents, businesses and municipalities to do as much as possible to conserve water and go beyond their requirements.

Setting a Target

On April 21, 2015, the San Jose City Council triggered a 30% emergency water reduction declaration to comply with the SWRCB mandate for water conservation throughout California.

Even though the state required San Jose to reduce water usage by only 20%, city leaders decided to set the higher goal of 30% to help combat the effects of the drought and preserve local and distant water supplies for the city. To reach this water reduction goal citywide, it was crucial to emphasize the importance of working together to all community members, from residents to businesses to water retailers. "We're in this together. We must all do our part to save water," said Kerrie Romanow, director of the San Jose Environmental Services Department.

The Environmental Services Department led an effort to ensure that the city's three water retailers adopted the higher goal and implemented the same requirements. This also led neighboring municipalities to adopt the same watering day rules for their cities and towns.

With residential outdoor watering representing about 35% of the San Jose's total water use, one of the first steps was to cut back on outdoor water use. This activity can help the average household cut its water bill nearly in half.

Watering Restrictions

The declaration of the 30% reduction goal triggered new watering restrictions that were

put into effect immediately through March 31, 2016. Because outdoor water use is the easiest place to conserve, the restrictions mainly focused on outdoor watering.

San Jose's outdoor watering restrictions include:

- Be cool: Water when it is cool, using a handheld hose with an automatic shutoff

nozzle or irrigation system, before 10 a.m. and after 8 p.m. With a sprinkler system, water before 10 a.m. and after 8 p.m. only on two designated days: Odd-numbered addresses may water on Mondays and Thursdays; even-numbered addresses may water on Tuesdays and Fridays.



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REGULATIONS

- Be trendy: Use greywater to wash the car, take it to a commercial car wash or leave it dirty.
- Be local: Use community pools or the beach. Do not refill residential pools and spas more than 1 ft, and refrain from initially filling with potable water, except when existing pools are drained to repair leaks.
- Be quick: Fix water leaks as soon as possible. If notified of a leak in your system, fix it within five working days.
- Be in control: Do not let water flow into gutters or streets.
- Be a sharp shooter: Use automatic shut-off nozzles. Hoses are required to have a nozzle that shuts off automatically when the handle is released.
- Be a sweeper: Sweep hard surfaces. Use a broom instead of a hose to clean patios, sidewalks, driveways, parking lots or other hard surfaces.



Residents can print handouts to spread awareness and report water waste via phone, email or mobile app.

Business-specific watering restrictions include:

- Be precise: Provide customers with water only upon request.
- Be efficient: Use low-flow spray valves when washing dishes by hand. Handheld spraying fixtures for dishwashing must be fitted with low-flow spray valves that automatically shut off.
- Be selective: Make daily towel and linen

service optional. Hotels must offer guests the option to help conserve water by having fresh towel and linen service only upon request.

- Be resourceful: Use recycled water for construction activities. Use of potable water from hydrants is prohibited.

Water Conservation Tips

Beyond the outdoor watering rules, the city of San Jose also has been encouraging residents and businesses to save water indoors through easy and simple indoor water-saving tips. With the call for everyone to reduce water use by 30%, the tips are a crucial component in helping people in apartments and condominiums find ways to conserve, because the outdoor tips apply more to residents with yards.

San Jose's indoor water-saving tips include:

- Go check: Find and fix leaks to save 15 gal per day (gpd).

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- Go with the flow: Use low-flow showerheads to save 12 gpd.
- Go express: Reduce showers by five minutes to save 15 gal.
- Go load up: Only do full loads of laundry to save 20 gal per load.

Water Conservation Awareness

Due to increased awareness about the need for water conservation, many residents were interested in how to report cases of water waste. To provide people with a convenient way to communicate with neighbors about water conservation, San Jose created an easy-to-use handout for people to print and provide to others about the watering restrictions. Residents also have the option to report water waste to the Santa Clara Valley Water District by phone, email or mobile app.

Another important factor in water conservation is the use of recycled water and greywater, which is exempt from San Jose's water

conservation rules. With almost 800 recycled water customers in the South Bay, many landscaped areas at business, retail and municipal locations are kept green with recycled water. Some residents would notice these green lawns and become concerned about water waste. To deal with misconceptions, the city focused on the need for messages about recycled water use and decided to place signs in public parks to alert people that recycled water was used in those areas.

Early Results

After several months of promoting water conservation and San Jose's restrictions, residents and businesses have stepped up to the plate to exceed the water reduction goal of 30%. Compared with the same months in 2013, San Jose reached 35% reduction in May and 33% reduction in June.

San Jose will have to keep up its rate of savings for the months to come and continue to

incorporate long-term water conservation measures to help preserve water during this drought and any water shortages in the future.

San Jose will be launching two pilot programs this fall. The first, Lawn Busters, will provide low-cost lawn conversion from grass to drought-tolerant landscaping for homeowners. The second will utilize new software to provide detailed water use reports to homeowners, allowing for comparisons of their water use with similar households in their neighborhoods.

While the proactive efforts taken by San Jose have helped reduce water usage during the past few months, residents will need to continue doing their part by making water conservation an everyday part of their lives by saving water now and in the future. **WQP**

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