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A Community Newsletter from the Contra Costa Water District | Volume 22, Number 2, Summer 2008

Renew Your Conservation Efforts and Use Water Wisely



California is facing its second consecutive dry year. Winter started off with a good snowpack in the Sierra, but the storms came to an abrupt halt in early spring and the weather has been dry since. As a result, the state's water supply is now well below average.

Some Bay Area water agencies are experiencing critical shortages, and Governor Schwarzenegger has declared a statewide drought. The Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) is asking all customers to voluntarily conserve water as much as possible.

By saving water now, you can help protect our water reserves in preparation for the possibility of another dry year. Please renew your commitment to water conservation and ensure that you always use water efficiently. If we dip too deeply into our water reserves now, and we have another dry year, we could be facing a severe water shortage and the possibility of mandatory rationing next summer.

There are lots of ways you and your family can save water, and many of them can be found by visiting www.ccwater.com/conserv. Here are a few water-saving tips:



Don't Water Your Lawn Every Day: Adjust your sprinkler timer to water the lawn every other day, at the most. Use the cycle and soak method of watering. For example, if you have fixed

or pop-up spray sprinklers, try watering three cycles a day, 4 to 6 minutes each cycle, with starting times scheduled one hour apart. This will prevent runoff. Be sure to adjust your sprinkler heads to avoid overspray onto pavement.

Water Saving Tips: continued on back page

Summer Gardening Tips

Help Your Landscape Survive the Hottest Days of Summer

Landscapes in Contra Costa County can struggle in the summer heat. Below are some tips from landscape professionals to help your yard flourish through the dog days of summer.

PLANT DESIGN Avoid planting lawn in areas that are hard to water, such as steep slopes and narrow strips along sidewalks and driveways. If you have a lawn that is not being used regularly, consider replacing it with a water-efficient garden.

Select plants that thrive in our climate and soil. Generally, Contra Costa County has hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. And many of us have heavy clay soil. There are plenty of plants that thrive in these conditions, including California native cultivars and Mediterranean plants. Ask your local nursery for plants that thrive in our climate and soil. Or request a free Water-Wise Gardening CD-ROM for PC computers from the Water District at www.ccwater.com/conserv



Group plants with the same watering needs together to get the most out of your watering. This "hydro-zoning" will ensure that your plants are not over or under watered.

Don't plant a new landscape at the peak of the summer season. The heat will put your plants in shock and they will be damaged. Instead, spend some time amending your soil and installing your watering system, then wait until September to purchase and install your plants. Your garden will thank you!

Protect Your Landscape: continued on back page

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint by Saving Water

Conserving water this summer will not only stretch the supply, it is an effective way to save energy and reduce the carbon footprint of our community. Pumping and treating water is the largest single use of California's electricity, much of which is generated by thermal power plants that burn fossil fuels.

Experts call the amount of energy required to produce and transport goods the "embedded energy cost" of those goods. In the case of water, the embedded energy cost is high because water is pumped and treated twice – at a water treatment plant before it is used, and at a wastewater treatment plant after it is used.

If everyone conserved water, the amount of energy expended for pumping and treating could be greatly reduced. That, in turn, would reduce the amount of energy needed from thermal power plants that emit greenhouse gases.

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The Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) serves treated and untreated water to approximately 550,000 people in central and eastern Contra Costa County. CCWD provides treated water to Clayton, Clyde, Concord, Pacheco, Port Costa and parts of Martinez, Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek.

In addition, CCWD sells wholesale treated water to the City of Antioch and the Golden State Water Company in Bay Point, and treats water at the Randall-Bold Water Treatment Plant in Oakley for distribution to the Diablo Water District and the City of Brentwood.

CCWD also sells untreated water to the cities of Antioch, Martinez and Pittsburg and the Golden State Water Company in Bay Point, as well as 22 industrial customers.

CCWD Teaches Students About Water Quality and the Environment

The Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) believes education is the key to protecting our natural resources. To that end, CCWD offers an extensive Water Education Program to teach students in its service area about water quality, the environment and how conservation and environmental stewardship can improve everyone's quality of life.



Here's more information about CCWD's educational programs:

CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS

Basic water concepts are covered, including water sources, treating water for health and safety, and source protection and conservation. In addition, the program is adjusted by grade level to cover the forces that move water, properties of water, California water history, the water cycle, water treatment and the connection between groundwater & surface water. This program is offered to grades 2-6, including special education.

WATER TREATMENT PLANT TOURS

Students learn how water is made safe to drink by visiting a state-of-the-art water treatment plant in Concord or Oakley. Students learn

about the organisms and contaminants in untreated water and how water is treated to make it safe to drink. They follow the steps through the treatment plant and observe chemists and microbiologists as they test the water. This program is available to fifth-grade and up.

ASSEMBLY THEATER PRESENTATION

This fun and engaging assembly theater program changes every year. It delivers important messages about the local water system, conservation, sustainability and environmental connectivity. Students and teachers interact with the performers as music, story-telling and comedy bring the messages to life. This 45-minute program is great for elementary and middle school children.

CANAL SAFETY ASSEMBLY PROGRAM

For schools located near the Contra Costa Canal, this program is essential for keeping students safe. This community service presentation is provided year round to remind students that canal safety rules exist to protect them and their families. Presented by uniformed CCWD Safety Patrol officers, the 30-minute program is for elementary school children.



DELTA DISCOVERY VOYAGE

Fifth-graders in CCWD's service area spend half a day on the Research Vessel Brownlee studying the Delta and learning about ecology, hydrology, wildlife and the environment. Classroom science lessons come alive during this field trip, which takes place on a 90-foot-long vessel custom built in 1998 to provide a safe and stable floating laboratory for students.

THE WATERSHED CONNECTION

Field trips to the 18,500-acre Los Vaqueros Watershed just outside of Brentwood are offered to teach students about the relationship between a healthy environment and clean, safe drinking water. This program books very quickly every year and is already full for the 2008-09 school year.

To learn more about CCWD's program, go to www.ccwater.com/education.

Protect Your Landscape

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LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Mulch is the little-noticed workhorse of many a smart gardener's landscape. Maintain a 2- to 3-inch layer of organic mulch in all planting areas. This will improve plant health, reduce water evaporation, improve soil and keep soil temperature cool in the summer. Mulch should be replenished at least once a year.

Mow lawns 2 ½ to 3 inches high during the summer. This may be higher than you mow now. It will improve the quality of the lawn and reduce water demand. Taller grass blades will shade the soil better and create a more uniformly green appearance.

Do not use a blower to clean out planting areas. This common mistake removes mulch and topsoil, which will expose plant roots at the soil surface. Instead, clean planting areas gently by hand and keep a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch around plants.

Reduce runoff by watering your lawn and other plants in cycles. Multiple, short cycles timed to start about an hour apart work best. During the peak summer months, most lawns need to be watered no more than every other day. You can find lots of information about watering your landscape at www.ccwater.com/conserv.



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Water Saving Tips:

Get High-Efficiency Toilets With a CCWD Rebate: Reduce the amount of water you use to flush toilets by as much as 60 percent by replacing toilets manufactured before 1992 with new high-efficiency toilets. These new toilets use advanced technology to reduce water use and improve flushing performance. For a limited time, the Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) is offering rebates of up to \$175 per qualifying toilet. For a list of qualifying models and program guidelines, visit www.ccwater.com/conserv or call the CCWD Conservation Department at (925) 688-8320.

Get a High-Efficiency Clothes Washer With a CCWD Rebate: Replace your older top-loading clothes washer with a new high-efficiency model to save a significant amount of water and energy. High-efficiency washers use 50 percent less water and energy than conventional washers, and they are kinder to your clothes. For a limited time, CCWD, in partnership with PG&E, is offering rebates of up to \$200. For a list of qualifying models and program guidelines, visit www.ccwater.com/conserv or call the Conservation Department at (925) 688-8320.

Get a Free Landscape Water Use Assessment: For most households, landscapes are water guzzlers. The opportunities for conservation are plentiful, but most people aren't sure where to start or how far to go. To help, CCWD is offering free Home Landscape Water Evaluations for single-family homes that have irrigation systems. When you schedule an evaluation, a trained surveyor

will inspect your irrigation system, suggest improvements, prepare a site-specific watering schedule and adjust your sprinkler timer. Customers who have used this service in the past have learned how to save thousands of gallons of water while improving the appearance of their landscapes. You can schedule a survey by calling the Conservation Department at (925) 688-8320.

Reduce or Eliminate Your Lawn: Lawn is the thirstiest plant in most home landscapes. Consider replacing some or all of your lawn this fall with a beautiful deck or low-water-use garden. To help you choose new plants, CCWD is offering a free Waterwise Gardening CD-ROM for PC computers. You can get one by visiting www.ccwater.com/conserv or calling the Conservation Department at (925) 688-8320.

Get Serious About Mulch: A 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch around your plants reduces your need to water by reducing water evaporation from the soil by as much as 70 percent. It will also reduce weed growth and keep your plants' roots cool in the summer. Replenish your mulch every spring.

Fix Leaks, Stop Drips and Reduce Your Use: Replacing the rubber flapper in your toilet tank and fixing your leaky faucets indoors and outdoors will go a long way toward saving water. Taking short showers, turning off the faucet while you brush your teeth or shave, installing aerators in your faucets and not running the dishwasher until you have a full load are good conservation measures, too.

By saving water this summer, you'll be doing your part to prepare for the possibility of a water shortage next year.