

Hotels, restaurants have slashed use of water

BY CALVIN DEMMON

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Bob McKenzie hears the question often, and it always makes him wince: "If we have such a big water problem in this county, why are we letting the hotels and restaurants use it all up?"

It's a good question, even when rephrased in neutral terms: Just how much does the tourist industry contribute to the area's water shortage?

The answer, according to a study of 10 years worth of water records just completed by

McKenzie: While the number of visitors to the Monterey Peninsula has increased steadily, water use by visitor-serving businesses has declined about 28 percent.

That's a sharper decrease than in any other sector of the community, McKenzie says that's because the industry has jumped heavily into retrofitting and other water-saving measures.

McKenzie, governmental affairs director for the Monterey County Hospitality Association, pored over sales and production data from California-American Water Co. for the period from fiscal year

1987-88 (before the most recent lengthy drought began) to fiscal year 1996-97.

The result indicates a significant reduction in water use by hotels, motels, restaurants, golf courses and other visitor-serving facilities in the Monterey Peninsula area.

"The hospitality industry has shown a reduction in water use," agrees Larry Foy, Cal-Am general manager. "They have probably done the most retrofitting as an industry."

McKenzie's chart breaks water use into standard categories. Fol-

lowing Cal-Am estimates, McKenzie allocated half the commercial total to tourism and half to other businesses such as retail stores, laundromats and offices.

Water use fell in each category except for the one Cal-Am designates as "other" — a catch-all that includes water for construction sites, street sweeping, sewer flushing and leakage in the system.

The decrease in tourism-related water use comes as tourism in the area has mushroomed.

One gauge of tourism is revenue from the transient occu-

pancy tax added to the rent of each hotel or motel room.

In the last 10 years, the tax rate has increased by just one-half of one percent in most jurisdictions, but revenues have ballooned, driven partly by increases in room rates and partly by increases in tourism.

In 1988, the hotel tax produced \$17.7 million. According to Nick Lombardo of the Monterey County Travel and Tourism Alliance, the tax could bring \$30 million to local governments this

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year — a 65 percent increase over the decade.

Under new requirements imposed in July by the Water Management District, all visitor-serving commercial facilities on the Peninsula, including gas stations, must install low-flow toilets — 1.6 gallons per flush — by Dec. 31, 2000.

Much of the retrofitting has already been done, McKenzie said, and some facilities have gone beyond requirements.

The DoubleTree Inn, for example, uses an electronic system in its restrooms that turns water off when hands are withdrawn from beneath a faucet, McKenzie said.

Several area golf courses have installed computer-driven irrigation systems that deliver water to planted areas depending upon soil condition, rather than watering them on a schedule.

Decade of water use

Over the 10-year period from 1987 to 1997, the hospitality industry has reduced its use of water more than any other category of water user, largely because of plumbing retrofits in hotels and restaurants.

CATEGORIES OF USE	1987-88	Percent	1996-97	Percent	Acre-feet change	Percent change
Residential:						
Single family	7,955	44.98	7,662	45.02	-293	-3.68
Multi-family	2,261	12.78	1,817	10.68	-444	-19.64
Subtotal	10,216	57.77	9,479	55.70	-737	-7.21
Hospitality:						
Hotels, restaurants	1,918	10.85	1,576	9.26	-342	-17.83
Golf courses	1,271	7.18	777	4.27	-544	-42.8
Subtotal	3,189	18.03	2,353	13.53	-836	-27.78
Other commercial	1,918	10.85	1,576	9.26	-342	-17.83
Industrial	100	0.57	127	0.75	27	27.00
Government	1,649	9.33	1,348	7.92	-301	-18.25
Other	612	3.46	2,185	12.84	1,573	257.03
Total	17,684	100.00	17,018	100.00	-666	-3.77

Source: Bob McKenzie of the Monterey County Hospitality Association
Data from Cal-Air and Monterey Peninsula Water Management District