



Media Release

Statewide Water Conservation Drops Below 18 Percent in August *Water Suppliers Urged to Maintain Conservation Message*

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SACRAMENTO — The State Water Resources Control Board today announced that urban Californians' monthly water conservation declined to 17.7 percent in August, down from 27 percent savings in August 2015, raising concerns that some water suppliers are abandoning their focus on conservation as California heads into a possible sixth drought year.

Californians continue to conserve water in significant amounts even in the absence of state-mandated conservation targets. The cumulative average savings from June 2015 through August 2016 was 23.3 percent, compared with the same months in 2013. Since June 2015, two million acre-feet of water has been saved — enough water to supply 10 million people, more than one-quarter the state's 38 million population, for a year.



However, water conservation has dropped steeply among some local water suppliers. These declines highlight the need for continued education and dialogue with customers on the importance of conserving and using water as efficiently as possible. As the State Water Board continues to monitor conservation levels, a return to state-mandated conservation may be necessary beginning next year.

“The statewide August conservation results raise questions, and we are examining the data to understand why some areas slipped more than others,” said State Water Board Chair Felicia Marcus. “Are we seeing relaxation of conservation messaging and programs, or are we seeing abandonment of programs? One may be appropriate, the other is not. It’s a mixed picture. Many communities who certified that they didn’t ‘need’ to conserve are still conserving up a storm, while others have slipped more than seems prudent.”

Marcus added: “While last year’s rain and snow brought a respite for urban California, we are still in drought, and we can’t know what this winter will bring. What we do know is that climate change will continue to make our water years even more unpredictable, so we need to retain our conservation habits for the long term, rain or shine, drought or no drought.”



Conservation Data

- Statewide water savings for August 2016 was 17.7 percent (124,094 acre-feet or 40.4 billion gallons), a decrease from July 2016's 20 percent savings, and also a decrease from August 2015's 27 percent statewide savings (63.5 billion gallons). August 2016 water savings are 36 percent lower than August 2015.
- Cumulative statewide percent reduction for June 2015 – August 2016 (fifteen months) is 23.3 percent, which equates to 2,024,599 acre-feet (659.7 billion gallons).
- Statewide average R-GPCD for August 2016 was 114.1 gallons; slightly up from 113.5 R-GPCD in July 2016 and also above 102.2 R-GPCD reported for August 2015. [All August data can be found on this page.](#)

Conservation levels have remained significant for many communities that had certified that they did not need top down mandates to keep conserving.

Under the board's revised [emergency water conservation regulations](#), urban water agencies have the ability to set their own conservation standards based on a "stress test" of supply reliability. Water suppliers had to document that they have sufficient supplies to withstand three years of continuous drought or take additional measures that include state-imposed mandatory conservation targets. The regulation is in effect through January 2017. Those stress test results are [here](#).

Of more than 400 local water agencies in California, 343 suppliers passed their stress test. Of those, 114 suppliers – or about a third – saved more than 20 percent in August, compared with the same month in 2013. These suppliers serve more than seven million people and include Sacramento, Alameda County Water District, San Gabriel Valley Water Company, San Gabriel Valley Fontana Water Company, Los Angeles County Public Works Waterworks District 40 (Antelope Valley), California-American Water Company Sacramento District, Contra Costa Water District, San Bernardino, Oceanside, Hayward, and Pomona.

While some local water suppliers may have relaxed water use restrictions from those that were in place last summer, most agencies have kept up locally mandated restrictions and targets, which is appropriate and which the state strongly encourages. Regardless of a supplier's individual conservation requirement, the statewide prohibitions on specific wasteful practices such as fountains without recirculating pumps, or irrigation of turf in street medians, remain in place.

Focus on Local and Regional Results

Some suppliers have seen modest reductions in conservation levels, based upon visibly improved water supply conditions or modest adjustments in their local conservation requirements. However, some suppliers have seen significant drops in conservation savings, raising questions about whether those suppliers are effectively communicating the need to conserve with their customers.

For example, among the 31 water suppliers that reported water savings between one and 10 percent in August 2016, a dozen of them had dropped from more than 20 percent savings a year earlier. This group includes Casitas Municipal Water District, Folsom, La Habra, Los Angeles County Public Works Waterworks District 29 (Malibu), Mountain House Community Services District, South Tahoe Public Utilities District, and Woodland. Some of these are in areas with improved water supply conditions; others are not.

Still, conservation remained high in many communities, and the total volume of water used in August 2016 was significantly lower than the same time period in 2013.

Some communities continue to maintain low overall per capita residential water use, which may not be reflected in percentage change, but illustrates a long-term commitment to efficient water use. For instance, Daly City, East Palo Alto, South Gate, and Golden State Water Company Florence Graham (South LA County) are examples of communities saving less than 10 percent in August 2016, yet the daily per capita use is already well below what a city in the Sacramento Region may be using on a daily basis. For agency data on water savings and average daily use, visit [here](#).

“Percentages alone tell only part of the story, because a 15 percent reduction by someone using under 100 gallons per person a day can be more challenging than a 30 percent reduction by someone using 250 or 300 gallons a day,” Marcus said. “That’s true of agencies and it is true for individuals. In particular, we urge suppliers where conservation levels have dropped steeply to reach out to high use customers to find ways to conserve, and to join their community’s conservation efforts. The legislature’s passage and Governor’s signing of SB 814 will help water suppliers send monetary signals to their highest users about the need to keep conserving while the drought continues. Most important, it sends a signal that all Californians are in this together and that fairness includes those who use the most doing their part along with the rest of us.”

SB 814 (Hill) requires urban water suppliers to establish financial penalties for excess water use during droughts. Suppliers can either create excess-use ordinances with defined penalty amounts, or they can adopt rate structures that charge their highest users more during drought emergencies.

Status of Permanent Water Use Efficiency Targets Effort

The recently adopted regulation is part of a wider effort to build on short-term, emergency water restrictions to establish permanent conservation measures that improve long-term drought preparedness and eliminate the worst water-wasting practices. These actions will help achieve a top priority of the state's Water Action Plan - to "Make Conservation a California Way of Life."

In May, Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. issued an [executive order](#) calling for new permanent water use efficiency targets for each urban water supplier and for strengthening local Water Shortage Contingency Plans. The local "stress test" data and three-year resiliency plans collected by the State Water Board will serve as a bridge to these actions and inform the development of new water use efficiency targets.

The [Board's work with state partner](#) agencies to craft a long term framework to meet Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.'s [executive order](#) calling for new water use efficiency targets, permanent prohibitions on water waste, and improved drought planning continues. The Governor's Executive Order calls on state agencies, including the State Water Board, Department of Water Resources, California Public Utilities Commission, Department of Food and Agriculture, and the California Energy Commission to transition to permanent, long-term improvements in water use. The Department of Water Resources and State Water Board are directed to develop new water use targets as part of a permanent framework for urban water agencies.

Those new targets build upon existing state law, and will be based on strengthened standards for indoor water use; outdoor irrigation; commercial, industrial, and institutional use; and water lost through leaks. The state agencies are preparing a report, due January 10, 2017, that will detail the proposed framework, new standards, and implementation timeline. Information about the Executive Order can be found [here](#).

Prohibitions also remain against homeowners associations or local governments taking action against homeowners who reduce or stop watering lawns. As directed by the executive order, the State Water Board will be making these prohibitions permanent.

Background

California has been dealing with the effects of an unprecedented drought. To learn about all the actions the state has taken to manage our water system and cope with the impacts of the drought, visit [Drought.CA.Gov](#). Every Californian should take steps to conserve water. Find out how at [SaveOurWater.com](#). While saving water, it is important to properly water trees. Find out how at [www.saveourwater.com/trees](#). In addition to many effective local programs, state-funded turf removal and toilet replacement rebates are also available. Information and rebate applications can be found at: [www.saveourwaterrebates.com/](#).

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