

Hi Julie,

One of the challenges of any ordinance is that mandated watering days (like 2 or 3 per week) do not take into account the soil type or the water application rate. As you probably know, clay soils do not accept water quickly nor do they dry out rapidly. At the other end of the spectrum is sandy soil that the water practically drops through and dries out quickly. The water restriction, therefore, should be on the amount of water applied within a given time frame (perhaps per week) and not how or when it is applied. Many of the drought tolerant succulents and native plants will rot in clay soils and need quick draining sandy soils in order to be successful. The average home owner could be throwing away a lot of money if he or she is not able to take a much more educated approach to replacing existing plantings.

Some landscapes have already been converted to drought tolerant plantings and/or paving materials and the water required to keep such a compliant landscape alive can not be further reduced. Residents have been requested to reduce their water usage for many years. Those residents and businesses that have complied in the past are now in a position of not being able to reduce their water usage by any significant amount. They are now in a position to be penalized for having complied quickly with past requests to reduce water use.

Some existing landscapes are so valuable that it is less expensive to use the water and pay a higher rate than it is to demolish the landscape and replant again with hundreds of drought tolerant plants. The decision is just a pure matter of economics and not everyone has the money to replace their landscapes.

I designed educational water conservation gardens for many of the water districts in the San Diego area back in the 1980's. The gardens were not promoted or maintained so there is very little left of them now. The only significant drought tolerant plantings I designed that remain from that era include the the Desert Botanical Garden in Balboa Park and the Anza Borrego Desert Visitor Information Center. So it looks like our water districts did not take our potential water shortage seriously and the people have to pay for their failure.

During our last serious drought (probably in the 80's) the water districts were providing the public with all kinds of educational materials and water conservation kits. 5 gpm water restrictors for showers were made available along with water dams for toilets, etc. As far as I know none of this has been done since that time. I have called the water districts in the past and asked why there has been no effort to restrict the use of water and I was told that the enforcement was too difficult. Their approach seems to be not to give any advice and when the public gets their next outrageous water bill the public will figure it out for themselves. That is not what I'd call a proactive approach especially when the public will be charged more for using less due to the fixed operating costs of the water districts.

There is a serious need to educate the public about water conservation and dispel existing concepts that their yards need to look like the Nevada or Arizona deserts with nothing but cactus and gravel. Examples of before and after landscapes available on the Web would help; so would having booths at County Fairs and other significant public gatherings. Special educational brochures could be mailed out to the public with their water bills.

I read about how many of our dams were evaluated for earthquakes and the water behind them was drained to the ocean in order to make repairs to the dams. The only problem is that the repairs never happened and all of that water is gone. I hope I was misinformed because the public reaction to this information will be quite negative if it is true. The creditability of the water districts and all of those associated with planing for the water needs of California is certainly on the line now and removing personnel will not solve the immediate problem. The situation seems similar to many of the whistle blower situations we read about today where everyone knows it has been happening but no one wants to be the first to recognize the problem.

Many in our society are finding it difficult to accept that the little smelt that are preventing the northern California water from going to southern California can not somehow be accommodated. When

the California Condors became endangered special areas were set aside for their survival and special breeding programs were implemented. That effort has been very successful. Farms for fish, shrimp and abalone are very successful these days too. Obviously I know next to nothing about the smelt (if it is actually the problem) but it would seem possible to develop a breeding program and special facilities to perpetuate their existence and resolve the present dilemma of choosing between fish or people.

If I can be of any assistance to you in this serious challenge please to not hesitate to contact me.  
Sincerely,  
Roger DeWeese, FASLA, retired.