

Calif. water rates rise as drought costs cities

By Fenit Nirappil, AP

Saving water doesn't always mean saving money in parched California.

Millions of Californians expecting relief on their water bills for taking conservation measures instead are finding higher rates and drought surcharges.

Water departments are increasing rates and adding fees because they're losing money as their customers conserve. They say they still have to pay for fixed costs including repairing pipelines, customer service and enforcing water restrictions – and those costs aren't decreasing.

The financial blow is only expected to grow because Gov. Jerry Brown's administration has ordered communities to slash their water use anywhere between 8 and 36 percent compared to 2013 levels in response to the four-year drought. Those cuts are expected to leave agencies with a \$1 billion hole in revenue, and they'll likely turn to customers to plug it, according to state estimates.

"Just because you use less water does not mean you have lower rates or a lower bill," said Lori Dolqueist, a water attorney who represents private utilities. "All of these agencies and private water companies are being told to sell less of what they do. It's a challenge financially."

While intensive conservation reduces strains on local water supplies, it can spell trouble for government budgets.

Santa Barbara, for example, expects to lose \$5 million if residents hit the city's 20 percent water use reduction

target. Residents are going above and beyond and reached 37 percent in May. That's good for water supply but bad for financial stability.

This month, water bills in Santa Barbara rose between \$13 and \$120, depending on water use, to help the city recover lost revenue and activate a desalination plant.

"Our folks are coming in and saying 'Hey, I'm doing everything right, why do I need to pay more?'" said Joshua Haggmark, the city's water resources manager.

It's not clear precisely how widespread drought-related rate increases are because no government agency or association tracks them.

But agencies across California are reporting they've taken steps to tap customers to offset the losses of conservation. Residents in the Bay Area, for example, are seeing higher bills after the region's largest water wholesaler increased the price of water 28 percent to make up for lagging sales.

Others are opting for a clearly labeled temporary drought fee, including the Sacramento suburb of Roseville which raised \$1 million in the last year with a 15 percent surcharge on water use.

That surcharge, plus the relatively low price of water, left some residents disappointed by their bills after buying low-flow toilets and tearing out their lawns.

Travis Wills, 42, is still paying about \$30 a month even after ditching a grassy front lawn for black mulch with sego palms, jasmine and Agapanthus flowers and collecting water from his shower and sink in buckets for plants in his backyard.

"We haven't noticed much of a difference on the bill," said Wills, who runs a home staging company. "That's troubling because they want us to reduce water."

Roseville could double its surcharge if the dry spell deepens, which Wills says he wouldn't mind too much.

"Maybe if they do that, people will stop wasting so much."

Dwindling water supplies during the drought have also driven up bills as agencies turn to more expensive resources. The East Bay Municipal Utility District, serving 1.3 million customers east of San Francisco, is charging the average household an extra \$12 a month to pay for tapping water dozens of miles away near Sacramento and conservation programs.

Some water departments are able to weather a drought financially because they designed complicated rates that plan for conservation and cover fixed costs in times of drought. Even without such mechanisms, others manage to avoid rate hikes.

The Desert Water Agency serving Palm Springs was among the fiercest critics of California's mandatory conservation order. It warned regulators it would lose more than \$10 million under its 36 percent reduction target.

Instead of increasing its rates, the agency has tapped reserves and cut expenses by delaying needed infrastructure upgrades and implementing a hiring freeze. But residents may end up paying more when the agency sets new rates next year.

"This is a business regardless of what some people think," general manager David Luker said. "When we strangle a business because of political correctness, there are massive consequences, and we still have to pay our bills."

Drinking too much water during exercise can be bad

By Ariana Eunjung, Washington Post

The idea that you should always stay hydrated has been ingrained in many of us since childhood by everyone from Little League coaches to parents. For many athletes that advice has been translated into drinking a lot and drinking often while exercising.

Now a panel of experts says that practice is not only outdated but dangerous. On Tuesday, a group representing sports medicine doctors, physiologists and trainers issued new guidelines telling people to stop drinking in excess during physical activity. Practically speaking, that means you should only drink when you're thirsty.

Writing in the Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine, the specialists said that "aggressive drinking to prevent dehydration is unnecessary and carries with it greater risk."

Read the whole story

Rules being written to keep bears from trash

By Kathryn Reed

New regulations are designed to keep bears and other critters out of commercial and multifamily residential trash bins on the South Shore.

The Waste Management Joint Powers Authority last week voted that the lids, which can be plastic, must be shut at dusk or when the business closes. They may be opened no earlier than dawn, unless it's trash day, then the time is 5:30am.

The current ordinance does not say the lids must be closed or what hours to do so.

"We've had issues where lids are open all night and that's more attractive to bears," JoAnn Conner, South Lake Tahoe's rep on the JPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Plastic lids will be allowed until a bear breaks through it. At that time South Tahoe Refuse will issue the customer an estimate to get it replaced with a metal lid.

The JPA is comprised of the city, El Dorado County and Douglas County – but just in the basin. Sue Novasel (EDC supervisor) and Nancy McDermid (DC commissioner) are the other two members of the JPA.

Residential customers will not have to get a bear resistant container until there has been an issue with trash being strewn all over. On the second offense where animals have been in the trash that customer will have to pay a fine and get a container or bear box. The screw top trash cans would be permissible until those prove not to work.

A difference among the jurisdictions is whether to require bear boxes when a new residence is built or a remodel takes place. El Dorado County requires the box under those circumstances. The city doesn't. Douglas County, which does not have mandatory trash pick up like its neighbors, also does not mandate the boxes because of new or significant construction.

Conner's belief is that mandating boxes in those instances is a punishment to people who have done nothing wrong.

It will be up to the individual jurisdictions to decide if construction triggers the need for a bear box.

The JPA is expected to vote on the final ordinance in September. The individual jurisdictions are likely to give direction or vote on the ordinance before then.

DUI arrests down in El Dorado County

Fewer drivers in El Dorado County have been arrested on driving under the influence charges this Fourth of July period compared to 2014.

From 12:01am July 3 through midnight July 4, officers representing three county law enforcement agencies had arrested six people who were allegedly driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Last year, 16 individuals were arrested during same the 48 hours.

Last year there was two alcohol related deaths during this same time. There were zero this year.

Patrols are out in force today as well.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Alcohol consumption can ruin summer fun

By Cate Neal

Summer around Tahoe is the perfect time for outdoor activities with family and friends. For some, drinking alcoholic beverages is part of the fun-in-the-sun experience. But excessive alcohol consumption and summer activities don't mix.

The American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma reports alcohol plays a role in half of all trauma-related injuries. According to the Centers for Disease Control, alcohol relates to 70 percent of water recreation deaths and 48 percent of pedestrian fatalities. Here are a few scenarios for how alcohol can lead to tragic consequences on the water, on the road, and in the outdoors – and how you can avoid a tragedy.



Cate Neal

The sensational swimmer

Alcohol decreases inhibition and impairs mental and physical capabilities, a risky combination for swimmers. In the frigid Lake Tahoe waters, a seasoned swimmer who's had a few drinks may foolishly venture out too far. A leg cramp makes it difficult to return to shore and even a chill can develop into hypothermia. Avoid going far from shore and stay within a beach's designated swimming zone.

The boastful boater

Boating and drinking are not a healthy cocktail. Alcohol impairs judgment, balance, and vision. It decreases reaction time and increases fatigue. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports 60 percent of boating fatalities involved alcohol and a boat operator with blood alcohol concentration of at least 0.1 percent is 16 times more likely to die in a boating accident than a sober operator. Drinking passengers are also more likely to slip on the deck or fall overboard.

The distracted driver

Summer vacation drivers are out in force. Many are unfamiliar with the roads and have other distractions, such as hauling a boat or camper, or dealing with children and pets in the backseat. Adding alcohol puts the driver and passengers as well as other drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists in harm's way. Thirty-one percent of vehicle crash fatalities, the CDC states, were connected to alcohol consumption in 2013.

The inebriated trail user

On the trail, heat exposure and alcohol can create trouble. Hot summer days increases sweat and alcohol causes additional fluid loss from increased urination. Together, excessive water loss can quickly lead to dehydration or heat stroke. Stay hydrated. Drink ample cold, non-alcoholic drinks when hiking or biking.

The sober survivor

The easiest safety tip is to avoid drinking, particularly in the risky situations suggested above. Or, if you do drink, find a sober driver, drink plenty of water, and avoid operating any motorized vehicle.

Barton Health is committed to keeping our community and

visitors safe. In the upcoming months, Barton is unveiling the Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention (SBI) program. Patients admitted with a trauma-related injury, such as a concussion or broken limb, complete a brief questionnaire on their drinking habits. Depending on the score, patients receive a counseling session regarding drinking behavior and how it may be related to the injury.

“Teachable moments” like this following a trauma incident greatly reduce hazardous drinking habits. Alcohol SBI program participants experience less DUI arrests, healthcare costs, and hospital visits related to drinking. In the long run, less trauma incidents also make Tahoe safer for all to enjoy.

Cate Neal is a registered nurse and trauma program coordinator at Barton Memorial Hospital.

Genetic research lays foundation for conservation

By Cally Carswell, High Country News

Back when he was in his 30s, Tom Whitham would have been leery of the meddlesome approach to conservation that he is laying the foundation for today. Whitham came out West in 1973 to pursue a doctorate in biology at the University of Utah. He had just finished a tour as an Army photographer at a hospital in Hawaii filled with soldiers injured in Vietnam, a difficult experience that had one positive result: He encountered buzzing, singing and tangled rainforests, and became enchanted with wild places, which were rare in his native Iowa. He

decided to move to the American West because, he says, “we hadn’t plowed it under yet.”

He imagined it as an untamed frontier. Though not naive about the human tendency to damage the environment, he thought the West was still too big and sparsely populated to be threatened in any existential sense. One good way to protect or heal the environment, he believed, was to leave it alone. Given time and space, nature could often fix itself.

Today, Whitham is a meticulous and accomplished ecologist based at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. He wears round glasses, a gray goatee and, when outdoors, an oiled leather cowboy hat. His love of nature hasn’t wavered. At last count, his home garden boasted 120 species of native conifers, poplars, shrubs and grasses. In the field, he always carries a camera, and even at sites he’s studied for decades, he still finds things worth photographing. But he thinks the frontier is dead. He is no longer optimistic about nature healing itself. The challenges – a climate in disorder, a looming sixth extinction, and people, always more people, always seduced by short-term gain – have grown too big, too fast.

Whitham believes the answers lie in an unexpected place: The DNA of species so common we usually take them for granted. As Whitham and his colleagues have researched the Southwest’s cottonwoods and piñon pines, they’ve introduced groundbreaking new ideas about how these trees’ genetic traits influence the community of surrounding organisms, and even shape entire ecosystems. If their discoveries hold true in kelp beds, coral reefs, tropical forests and desert shrublands – and so far, they have – they may transform our understanding of how everything in the web of life is connected.

Read the whole story

Book sale, music at South Tahoe library

Friends of the Library's summer book sale is July 25.

It is from 10am-3pm at the South Lake Tahoe Library, 100 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Members get access at 9am. It's possible to join that morning.

There will be a free music on the lawn at the library from noon-2pm.

How to fight insect bites

By Amy Kraft, CBS News

Summertime is all about enjoying the great outdoors. But there is a pesky little threat that could spoil your fun: insects like mosquitoes and ticks. The threats posed by insect bites are increasing, according to researchers, as climate change makes summers hotter and, in some places, wetter.

"One insect can spot you 150 feet away and actually zone in on you," Clifford Bassett, medical director of Allergy and Asthma Care of New York, told "CBS This Morning." "So you really don't want to be a target."

What attracts mosquitoes?

“There are 400 compounds in our skin that are attractive to mosquitoes,” Bassett said. Mosquitoes are attracted to carbon dioxide in breath, sweat, higher body temperature, certain perfumes and scents, and pregnant women because they exhale more carbon dioxide than other people and have more blood circulating through their bodies. Research shows that the bodies of some individuals produce natural repellents to mosquito bites, which are genetically controlled.

Read the whole story

Multiple injuries in 3-car Truckee collision

Several people were injured in a three-vehicle accident Saturday night in Truckee.

Truckee police officers said alcohol likely contributed to the first vehicle rear-ending another, which caused the middle car to strike the one in front of it.

No names or hometowns of those involved have been released.

The driver accused of starting the chain reaction was not wearing a seat belt, according to officers. That person was transported to Renown Medical Center in Reno with major injuries after having struck the steering wheel and windshield.

Two occupants were taken to Tahoe Forest Hospital with minor to moderate injuries. Several other people reported minor injuries at the scene, but were not transported.

The 10:54pm July 4 accident on Highway 267 near Brockway Road

is still under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Recovery time important for athletes

By Amanda MacMillan, Outside

Any time you increase the duration or the intensity of your workouts, you also increase your risk of injury—especially if you’re not tending to those body parts that are seeing the most wear and tear. The solution, says renowned physical therapist, Kelly Starrett, is to do just that: Devote 10 to 15 minutes, every single day, to basic maintenance on your body.

By maintenance, he means a mix of active recovery and mobility work—a routine he teaches in his books “Becoming a Supple Leopard” and “Ready to Run” as well as his popular Mobility WOD blog. These techniques, he says, bring fresh blood into tight muscles, increase joint and tissue range of motion, and improve mechanics and flexibility.

“When you do nothing on your days off, all you’re doing is resting and perhaps catching a mental break from training,” says Starrett. “But when you perform mobility work, you’re potentially shortening your recovery time and improving yourself as an athlete. And the best part is you’re not compromising your recovery or doing anything that will tax you mentally.”

Read the whole story