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Simi steps up water restrictions

City designates which days residents may water their lawns

By Carissa Marsh cmarsh@theacorn.com

Homeowners who receive their water from the city will now be allowed to irrigate their lawns only two or three days a week, depending on the time of year.

The City Council, acting in its capacity as the board of directors for Ventura County Waterworks District No. 8, declared a Level 1 water supply shortage on Monday to avoid incurring significant financial penalties for using too much water.

The decision means residents will be permitted to water only on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from April 1 to Oct. 31 and on Monday and Thursday from Nov. 1 to March 31.

The city's water conservation ordinance already prohibits watering from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Along with individual homeowners, the city, the school district, the park district, golf courses and homeowners associations must also follow the designated watering days.

Irrigation systems using smart controllers are exempt, and residents are allowed to water using a hand-held bucket or a hose with a positive shutoff nozzle. Commercial nurseries are also exempt.

The Level 1 declaration also requires that on-site water leaks be repaired within 72 hours of notification by the city.

The new rules, which will go into effect July 31, are part of the water conservation program the board adopted in May to reduce local water consumption and prevent water waste.

The program's three response levels correspond to worsening supply or emergency conditions. Level 3 bans irrigation altogether.

Joe Deakin, assistant director of public works, said the council needed to take the action in order to comply with the 15 percent reduction in regional water use mandated by the Metropolitan Water District in April and passed on by the city's supplier, Calleguas Municipal Water District.

If no action was taken, Deakin said, the repercussions could be costly.

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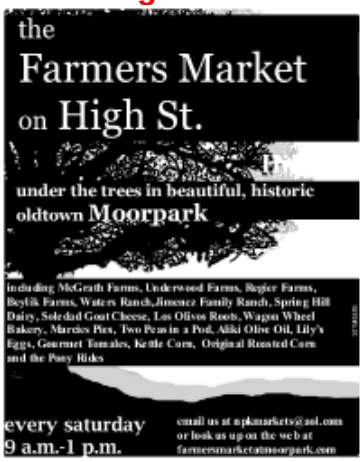

"If we don't comply with that, it will cost the district millions," he told the council, as Calleguas will charge the city a dramatically escalated cost for water usage above its allocation. Any penalties would be passed on to the consumer, Deakin said.

If the district didn't closely regulate water use this summer, it would be difficult or impossible to meet the 15 percent water reduction, a staff report said.

Still, council members said they had mixed feelings about designating permissible watering days, not wanting to come across as the "water police."

"My gut tells me that when you tell me what days I can water, that's going too far," Councilman Steve Sojka said. "But I realize that's probably so you can tell if people are in compliance or not."

City Manager Mike Sedell said other cities have implemented similar programs that limit watering to a certain number of days per week, but the rules are difficult to enforce unless the days are specifically designated.

The council said code enforcement staff—who will respond to neighbor complaints as well as keep a lookout for violations while driving around town—should be "friendly" when approaching residents who might be violating the ordinance, especially since it's difficult to know if someone is using a smart controller or not.

Sedell assured the council that the first contact with a resident would be educational and that fines would not be given for the initial offense. He added that his hope is that enforcement would stop at education and that the community, once aware of the new rules, would respond positively to the increased calls for conservation.

"The goal entirely is compliance, the goal isn't punitive," he said.

The council will review the program in six months to see if it's helping to reduce the city's water consumption.

City staff is developing a three-tiered water rate to bring to the board at a future date to further encourage long-term water conservation, a staff report said.

The city has a water conservation hotline at (805) 583-6420. Residents can e-mail inquiries to waterconservation@simivalley.org.