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Simi considers easing lawn-watering rules

By Anna Bakalis
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Simi Valley may loosen its water conservation ordinance to allow people to irrigate on any given day, for up to a total of 45 minutes in a week.

The Simi Valley City Council held off on a vote Monday night to change the ordinance from three designated days a week in the summer to any three days of the week. But council members want the city's staff to look into more flexible options for residents, while also keeping water usage down by 15 percent.

Councilman Glen Becerra said that before the mandated water restrictions, he used to water his lawn five days a week for five minutes.

"My lawn was a lot greener then than it is now," Becerra said.

Becerra said by watering 15 minutes three days a week in hopes of making up for the missed days of watering, he ends up with more runoff.

Ron Fuchiwaki, Public Works director, said his staff will look into ways to amend the allotment of watering time into minutes, rather than days. He will check in with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California to see if this option is feasible.

Simi Valley declared a "Level 1" water shortage emergency in July, limiting outdoor water use to Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in the summer months.

Metropolitan wrote the model conservation ordinance that cities have been adopting in the last few months. It specifies people can water only three days a week in the summer and two days in the winter.

The city ordinance states that residents — as well as city and park agencies and schools — can't water between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., and lawns or "stations" can be watered for 15 minutes at a time.

Initial numbers indicate that Simi Valley residents are cutting back on water usage: In July, water use was down 13.4 percent and 16.2 percent in August. The percentage is compared with 2004-2006 baseline levels for water use — an average calculated over three years.

Council members asked Monday if customers could see how much water they've used for a billing cycle, and compare it with the overall goal.

City staff said it could be labor intensive and costly, but Fuchiwaki said they would look into it.

Given the state's severe water shortage, Metropolitan has required that all of its customers reduce total water deliveries by 15 percent by June 2010.

The Simi Valley City Council is expected to continue the public hearing in its next meeting, scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Monday.

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