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A GUEST'S PERSPECTIVE: San Diego residents must help save water

By Bill Rose, Guest Commentator

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Like most of California, San Diego is in a water crisis. We face simultaneous, unprecedented challenges to our water supply, leading to this year's water shortages and increases in water rates.

Here's why.

In order to support San Diego's three million residents and $171 billion economy, the region's wholesale water supplier, the San Diego County Water Authority, imports more than 80 percent of the region's water supply.

During the 2008 fiscal year, which ended in June, 28 percent of the Water Authority's supply was imported from the California State Water Project, which routes runoff from the Sierra Nevada Mountains through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta; 54 percent came from the Colorado River, which runs through four other states before reaching California; and 18 percent came from local water supply projects. There are problems with all three of these sources.

First, the amount of water pumped through the Bay-Delta, the linchpin of the State Water Project, has been significantly curtailed in order to protect endangered fish that spawn there. Regulatory pumping restrictions are in place nine months of the year, and these restrictions aren't going to end anytime soon. This means unrestricted water deliveries to Southern California can only occur three months out of the year.

Second, for eight of the last 10 years, the Colorado River Basin has been in a drought. According to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "overall reservoir storage in the Colorado River Basin as of September 1, 2009 is … 58.5 percent of capacity."

Third, San Diego is also experiencing its third year of drought. This has resulted in the depletion of local storage reservoirs, reducing water supply reserves. In a June 22 article by KPBS News, San Diego County Water Authority General Manager Maureen Stapleton said, "(In) 2008 we had 3.2 inches of rain. The last time San Diego had that small of an amount of rain was when Thomas Jefferson was president."

The combination of these factors has led California and San Diego County to its present water crisis. According to the California Department of Water Resources, the statewide reservoir storage percentile continues to indicate that reservoirs are more than "abnormally dry" as of Sept. 2.

The Water Authority's main supplier, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, ordered a 13 percent cut in water deliveries to our region, effective since July 1. The Water Authority passed this cut down to its 24 member agencies (such as the City of San Diego) in the form of an 8 percent cut, and also declared a Level 2 "Drought Alert" condition, which has allowed member agencies to enact mandatory water use restrictions.

In the San Diego State area, these mandatory restrictions include: No watering between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.; irrigating only three days a week for 10 minutes maximum through the end of October; no hosing paved surfaces; repairing leaks within 72 hours; and fixing inefficient irrigation systems that waste water and cause runoff.

As San Diego residents and citizens, students have a responsibility to help save water. Saving water also reduces energy consumption by using less energy to import, treat, distribute, heat and treat sewage water for disposal or recycling, thus diminishing your carbon footprint.

Here's how you can help save water:

Get in touch with the Associated Students' Green Love initiative by either visiting the A.S. Government Affairs Office or stopping by its table in Aztec Center, every other Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

If you see broken pipes or sprinklers on campus, call the Physical Plant Services at extension 4-4754 or e-mail them at *wcontrol@mail.sdsu.edu*.

If you see water running down the street or sprinklers on in the middle of the day off campus in the SDSU area, call the City of San Diego's water waste hotline, 619-515-3500, or e-mail them at *waterwaste@sandiego.gov*.

Limit your showers to five minutes. You'll save 2.5 gallons of water for every minute you shave off your time.

Avoid using your toilet as an ashtray or trash can: Each flush is 1.6 gallons of water.

Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth or shaving and you'll save two gallons a minute.
When you do your laundry (or you take it home for mom to do), wash only full loads of clothes to save up to 50 gallons a load.

Only wash your car at a carwash that recycles its water.

Visit *www.20gallonchallenge.com* for more water-saving tips.

These are simple behavior changes, but together, they really add up. Take a second to think about your water use and start saving today. San Diego needs it.

—Bill Rose is the water conservation executive at the San Diego County Water Authority.

—This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of The Daily Aztec*. Send e-mail to* opinion@thedailyaztec.com*. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Include your full name, major and year in school.*

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