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NEWS

Officials urge water use reduction

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Low rainfall for eight years in Los Angeles caused 2007 to be the driest year since 1893.

By Katherine Peach / Special to The Malibu Times

With a fourth year of drought fast approaching, officials are calling on Los Angeles County area residents to reduce water consumption. A symposium took place mid-October in Encino, where county and Los Angeles city leaders spoke about ways to save water.

“When people hear about drought it seems to perpetuate a temporary situation,” Bill Kabaker, an irrigation conservation expert, said at the symposium. “There is a finite water supply and a rising population. Regardless how well we do, properties will see an increase in water costs.”

The Metropolitan Water District supplies Los Angeles County, including Malibu, with 30 percent of its water. “We're moving into an area where we have to be more cautious and careful on how we use water for the rest of our lives,” said Timothy F. Brick, chair on the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California board of directors.

Low rainfall for eight years in Los Angeles caused 2007 to be the driest year since 1893, Brick said. With the start of the rainy season, he warned low provisions are still a concern.

Malibu residents must comply with a county ordinance on reducing water use by 15 percent less than last year. Malibu residents will face fees that jump exponentially for additional water use.

Residents are advised not to allow pipes to go into disrepair, not to use water to clean hard surfaces such as sidewalks and driveways, or water landscapes during periods of rain.

“I want to remind people that the vast majority of water in Malibu and the mountains is used for landscaping,” Melina Watts, Malibu Creek Watershed coordinator, said, “which is mind boggling.”

Landscaping draws about 70 percent of the Malibu water supply, according to a study by the Malibu Creek Watershed Council. Watts advised residents to check that their sprinklers are working properly and turned off during periods of rain.

Lawn irrigation in Malibu is limited to two days per week between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m.

H. David Nahai, a panelist at the October water symposium and former LADWP chief, said, “Responsibility relies on our shoulders collectively. This is not just a matter of water reduction, but environmental responsibility.”

Giving examples of how to save water, Nahai cited that Israelis capture and reuse 70 percent to 75 percent of their wastewater compared to the 1 percent in California.

However, without a regional wastewater system in Malibu, residents must abide by firm restrictions against home grey water systems.

“There are lots of regulations on it and it's still a story that is unfolding,” Brick said briefly after the presentations. “A lot of progress can be made in run-off recapture.”

The vast landscaping at Pepperdine University in Malibu is an example of such water recapturing. It is irrigated with almost 95 percent reclaimed water, Rhiannon Bailard, director for the Center of Sustainability, said.

“Water conservation is our oldest practice we've done here,” Bailard said, “We think it's the most important we can contribute.”

Ways to save water

Bart O'Brien, a panelist at the water symposium, encouraged homeowners to embrace native plants. As a horticulturist for the Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Gardens, O'Brien explained how to utilize the fauna that Southern California has to offer.

“One of the most critical things about water conservation is that people say California is a desert,” O'Brien said. “It couldn't be farther from the truth.”

Local varieties of grapes, sage and strawberries thrive in the Malibu climate, he said. Succulent plants, which require minimal watering, are plentiful in the area. Water is so over subsidized that we are over engineered to spend money on water, O'Brien said.

“Often people think native plants have a wild look, but formal and clipped gardens can be achieved by massing together plants,” O'Brien said. He stressed the importance of mulch to trap water in the soil.

More ways to save water can be found online at www.bewaterwise.com

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