



Environmental
Health

County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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Press Release

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SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, CALIFORNIA -

Janet Beautz, Chairperson of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, has issued a proclamation declaring May as Water Awareness Month for Santa Cruz County. The County joins local water agencies and other organizations throughout California in promoting wise management and conservation of our critical water resources. This is particularly important as we are now in one of the driest years on record, which will strain water supply systems and the natural systems that are dependent on adequate streamflow.

The rainfall totals throughout central and southern California have been well below normal in 2007. The lack of winter and spring rainfall is already impacting water availability in Santa Cruz County especially for the water systems that primarily rely on surface water such as the City of Santa Cruz and Davenport. Although groundwater levels have not dropped as dramatically as stream flows, the water agencies that utilize groundwater are also preparing for a dry summer and increased water demand (for outdoor use). The Scotts Valley Water District, City of Santa Cruz, and Soquel Creek Water District have officially adopted voluntary water conservation targets for customers to reduce water use from 5% to 15% in order to prevent larger mandatory reductions later in the year.

Even though it is not as readily evident, groundwater purveyors are also impacted by low rainfall. With reduced rain and stream flow, there is less groundwater recharge. Without sufficient recharge, aquifer groundwater levels decline, resulting in higher pumping costs, less groundwater availability for shallower wells, poorer water quality, and seawater intrusion near the coast. Despite the previous wet year, all the county groundwater basins are in some level of overdraft. This year's reduced groundwater recharge will place an additional burden on the groundwater purveyors.

The dry water year also affects streams and the natural systems that depend on them. The San Lorenzo River and Soquel Creek both have less than half of the flow that they normally have this time of year and flows are expected to drop much further to critically low levels later in the summer. The low flows may be further reduced by stream diversions and pumping of groundwater that feeds the streams during dry periods.

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Water use from private wells and small water systems also affects groundwater basins and streams. Many private users draw from the same groundwater basins that supply the larger municipal users.

The Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Services and other Santa Cruz County water agencies urge all water users including private water users and small systems to practice water conservation this summer by changing water use habits and hardware. Good water-wise habits to practice this summer are to water the garden only during the morning or evening (between 4pm – 10am) to reduce water loss to evaporation and minimize activities that involve a constantly running hose (like “slip & slide”). Conservation through hardware can be achieved by using a shut-off hose nozzle when washing the car or watering, replace old toilets, and inefficient washing machines and fix leaking faucets and irrigation parts.

Water conservation is important to all Santa Cruz County water agencies. Most of the large water agencies in Santa Cruz County have numerous programs to help conserve water including rate discounts for low water users, free conservation information and devices such as hose shut-off nozzles, faucet aerators and low-flow showerheads. Many have toilet and energy star approved washer rebates over \$100.

Since landscape irrigation doubles average water use during the summer, pay close attention to irrigation leaks and try to use drip irrigation where possible. Try not to overspray onto the sidewalk and avoid run-off. If you can redesign your landscape, choose native and drought tolerant plants. If you see water being wasted in your neighborhood, call the water agency to investigate.

For information on rebate programs, links to water agencies in Santa Cruz County and tips on saving water, visit the following website: www.watersavingtips.org

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