

# No Santa Cruz water rationing

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Even though rainfall in the Santa Cruz Mountains has been barely half of normal levels this winter, Santa Cruz city water customers will have only voluntary conservation — not mandatory rationing — during the summer months.

They can thank rainy conditions a year ago, which filled Loch Lomond Reservoir near Ben Lomond to capacity last spring, said Bill Kocher, city water director.

Loch Lomond, Santa Cruz's only reservoir, was 83 percent full on Monday. But Kocher is still nervous.

"We're in a fairly enviable position right

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— Bill Kocher, city water director

now,” he said. “But the rainfall totals this winter have been disappointing.”

Tough water restrictions in place during the 1987-1991 drought will come back in 1995 if there aren't sizable rainstorms next winter, he said.

From October to the end of March, 26.2

inches of rain fell in the Newell Creek watershed, which feeds into Loch Lomond. That's 55 percent of normal seasonal rainfall.

In fact, that looks a lot like the meager totals from drought years of the recent past, Kocher said.

Similar totals were recorded in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

This summer, Santa Cruz will ask residents to follow voluntary conservation measures. There will be no fines, odd-even watering days or drought patrols looking for water wasters.

Under the voluntary rules, only the most basic water regulations apply, such as not washing down pavements and requiring spray nozzles on garden hoses.

Loch Lomond also opened to public fishing March 1.

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## Lack of rain doesn't mean water rationing in Santa Cruz

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This is the third year in a row without the mandatory rationing that locals came to live with during the drought. Santa Cruz water customers conserved water last summer even though no rationing was in place. The city used about 11 percent less water last year than in pre-drought years, suggesting that many conservation habits are now part of everyday life.

"People need to keep up their good conservation practices," Kocher said. "We're still in a tenuous situation."

Before the drought began in 1987, Loch Lomond was 100 percent full seven out of 10 years.

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But it has only spilled over once since 1987, last spring. Capacity is 2.8 million gallons, a two-year supply.

The Santa Cruz water department is the largest in Santa Cruz County. It serves 85,000 customers in Santa Cruz and Live Oak and at the University of California, Santa Cruz campus.

Most other water departments in the county have not imposed mandatory rationing, even during

the 1987-1991 drought

Officials at the Soquel Creek Water District, the Scotts Valley Water District, the San Lorenzo Valley Water District and the Watsonville water department have all used voluntary conservation measures in the past and plan to do so again this year, they said Monday.

The reason: Those water departments pump water from vast underground aquifers instead of using creeks or reservoirs, which often are less reliable and hold less water.

In an example of geological bad luck, Santa Cruz city officials have never found a major aquifer under their city, even after spending thousands of dollars to drill test wells.