

Water Surcharge To Be Levied In SC

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City of Santa Cruz water customers will pay drought surcharges monthly ranging from \$3 to \$60 beginning February.

And they face increased water rates in fiscal 1978-79, as well, the Santa Cruz City Council indicated Tuesday.

The surcharges were voted by the council Tuesday night to get the Water Department out of the red.

Legally, the Water Department may not run its operations at a deficit, and the drought left it with a deficit of about \$321,000 resultant from reduced water sales.

Because of its bonding arrangements that helped to build the water system, the city cannot terminate the fiscal year with the department in the red.

Morris Allen, Santa Cruz water director, made it clear that despite what some disgruntled water customers may say, he believes the council did an outstanding job in getting a program put together that enabled the city to get through the water crisis last year.

Allen noted with pride that the city had saved more water last year than any city in California, even more than had Marin, and he said he would defy anyone to say the council did not do an outstanding job.

But Councilman Bert Muhly took exception to a claim by Councilwoman Charlotte Melville

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the city could have avoided the surcharges and other problems had it accepted a water commission recommendation last February to raise the water rates.

Muhly said this request to raise the rates had come soon after the council had raised the rates for the first time in 12 years, and that it was a 24 percent rate increase being sought.

Muhly said he had based his vote not to raise the rates on such factors as water penalties to be assessed and contributions of revenue-sharing funds and other funds to the Water Department.

"We actually assessed \$2.89 million in penalties," Muhly said, "and have collected only around \$202,000."

Councilwoman Carole DePalma called the surcharge schedule "inequitable," asserting that for the homeowner the surcharge amounts to a 60 percent rate increase, whereas for larger users it would be a 20 or 10 percent increase.

Allen said that actually the surcharge is a levy against the size meter used, not consumption in any way. And he pointed out that necessarily the smaller meter must be hit because there are almost 17,000 of these, as compared with only eight or nine very large meters.

Specific charges by meter are: 5/8 x 3/4, \$3; 3/4, \$4.23; 1-inch, \$6.57; 1½ inches \$12; 2 inches \$18; 3 inches \$36, 4 inches \$48; 6 inches \$60.

The surcharge will apply to all billings rendered until July 31.

RR-S.C. - Water Crisis