SC Water Rationing Ends, With Controls

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Water rationing ended Tuesday night for an estimated 19,000 customers of the Santa Cruz water department.

But full controls were imposed by the Santa Cruz City Council to prevent water waste.

The end of the city's first water rationing program in modern times came on a unanimous council vote before only seven or eight spectators.

The vote rescinded the emergency rationing ordinance that has been in effect since March 1 and which was to have expired on Saturday. Then the council adopted a new emergency ordinance that controls water waste.

Because the adoption was on an emergency basis, the new law became effective immediately.

The new ordinance adopted was the same emergency ordinance that was proposed Oct. 25. At that time it got majority support on a 4 to 3 vote but was defeated because an emergency ordinance requires five affirmative votes for passage.

Councilmembers Bert Muhly, Carole De-Palma and John Mahaney, who blocked the passage in October, made it clear they have no apologies for their action at that time.

DePalma said: "I am really glad I did not vote to end rationing two weeks ago. We have had rain, a little rain, but not much. I am worried. I'm in the position of taking the water director's and the water commission's word we have enough water. I'm not too confident about this."

Muhly declared: "If it were not for the rain we have had since I would have stuck by my guns to keep the consciousness raised that we are in a water short area.

"We could increase allotments by the 30 percent of excess water we are producing now."

Mahaney said he would still prefer to increase water allotments by 30 percent but do away with penalties.

However, the council minority was faced by the necessity to either adopt the new ordinance as an emergency measure or to see all controls go off for a time after Nov. 12.

The controls would have gone off for almost a 30-day period after Saturday because the council majority could only have passed the proposed ordinance as a regular ordinance. These don't become effective until 30 days after adoption.

So the measure that failed by one vote on Oct. 25 got all the votes Tuesday to end the successful rationing program at once and to substitute the new ordinance.

The rationing program resulted in a 53 percent cutback of water use when only 37 percent cutback was expected. This saved water far beyond hopes but did lead to a huge deficit

requiring other council action (see story on Page 37).

The new ordinance lists water usages considered to be wasteful and provides for penalties for violators. Violations are subject to fines of $100 per day.

Forbidden are:

1. Washing sidewalks, driveways, filling station aprons, porches or other outdoor surfaces, except city street sweeping operations.

2. Washing building exteriors, except for windows.

3. Operating any ornamental fountain or other structure if it uses city water and does not recycle it.

4. All use of public showers, except in schools.

5. External washing of trailers, trailer houses, mobile homes and home exteriors and all commercial or recreational boat exteriors with an open flowing hose.

6. Indiscriminate running of water or washing with water not otherwise prohibited which is wasteful and without reasonable purpose.

7. Washing or rinsing motor vehicles with an open flowing hose. Private washing is permitted only when hose is fitted with a quick-acting positive shutoff nozzle, or by bucket and sponge. Commercial automobile washing is permitted only when water is recycled within an approved tolerance.

8. The watering of grass, lawns, ground cover, shrubbery, open ground, crops and trees, including agricultural irrigation, in a manner or to an extent that allows substantial excess water to run off the area being watered.