

Rationing to start

WATER SUPPLY

1990

By MARK BERGSTROM
Sentinel staff writer

4-30-90

SANTA CRUZ — Rationing begins Tuesday for 22,000 customers served by the Santa Cruz City Water Department.

Under the plan, a typical three-person household will be limited to 20 units of water (about 15,000 gallons) per two-month billing period.

That translates into about 50 gallons per day per person.

If customers exceed their ration by one to five units, each unit will cost \$5 in addition to the basic rate. Each unit over that will cost \$25 in addition to the basic rate.

Average water use is 20 units, according to Water Director Bill Kocher. "What that means is that 55 percent of our customers won't have to do anything more than they have been doing," Kocher said.

The other 45 percent will have to take steps to curb use or pay the penalties.

Under the rationing plan, residents are fairly free to use their allotment as they wish, except that outdoor watering is prohibited between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Rationing has been brought on by four consecutive drought years, with 1989-90 being the driest of the lot. The last four-year drought was 1928-31.

Late-spring rainfall last year prevented rationing. "We have had

almost no rainfall this spring," Kocher said. Late-spring rain is important, he said, because it causes north coast streams and the San Lorenzo River to flow.

The San Lorenzo River typically supplies 60 percent of the city water supply. North coast streams account for another 20 percent.

Without that flow, the water department will have to draw heavily on reserves at Loch Lomond Reservoir to meet the heavy summer demand.

Other water systems in the county, including Scotts Valley, Soquel and Watsonville, use wells to tap underground aquifers.

The city has only a couple of wells because it is not blessed with an underground source of water. The wells give Santa Cruz only about 10 percent of its yearly supply.

The start of rationing coincides with the beginning of Water Awareness Month.

To commemorate the event and to help customers cope with rationing, the Water Department will hold "Meter Day" on Tuesday. Staff will be available between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. at the water department at City Hall to show customers how to read their meters.

Customers also can bring in their water bills and learn how to set up their next six months' water budget.