

1988

# Water rationing looms in Santa Cruz

By KATHY SALAMON  
STAFF WRITER

The city of Santa Cruz seems to be heading toward mandatory water rationing this summer unless water users change their ways.

City Water Director Bill Kocher said the combination of dry weather and high demand for water is making the situation look bleak for the city's water supply.

"The situation is as bad or worse than we thought it would

be," Kocher said, who last month got a drought contingency plan passed by the City Council.

"Exacerbating the whole thing is that people are using water at a record clip," he said.

Normally in the month of March, Kocher said, Santa Cruz city water customers use about 225 million gallons. But based on use so far and projections for the rest of the month, users may drain the city water supply of 325 million gallons,

Kocher said.

The dramatic increase in use, he added, is probably because people have been watering their lawns more to compensate for the dry and windy weather.

According to the city's contingency plan, the city will evaluate its water situation on April 1 and then go into a certain phase of conservation.

The way things look now, Kocher said, the city will most likely bypass phase one alto-

gether — a phase that calls for a voluntary 5 percent reduction of water use — and move "at least" to phase two — calling for a voluntary 10 percent reduction.

Phase three, also a possibility, calls for a voluntary 20 percent reduction in use.

Mandatory water rationing begins at phase four.

"If March is a harbinger of things to come," Kocher said, "it is not inconceivable at all that we'll be in phase four at

June."

Among the rationing measures called for in phase four are penalties for water use over the allotment and the retrofitting of all homes and business with water-conserving shower heads and toilets.

Kocher said mandatory rationing can be avoided if water customers cut back water use now.

The drought contingency plan is designed so that if the city is successful in the appropriate

voluntary phase, it will not need to progress to a mandatory stage, Kocher added.

Therefore, the city Water Department will be trying to educate the public on the need to conserve water.

"In 1976-77, people cut back their water use by 38 percent almost overnight," Kocher said. "So I think that when people fully understand the gravity of the situation, they will pull back their usage."

The Soquel Creek Water District does not anticipate any water shortages this summer, district Manager Bob Johnson said.

"We do not expect to have a problem," Johnson said, "because all of our water comes from groundwater."

It's the surface water and not the groundwater, or well supply, that is bearing the brunt of this season's dry weather. Unlike Soquel Creek, however, the Santa Cruz water district relies on its surface water, and might turn to its neighbor for groundwater to augment that supply.

Johnson said the two districts have a mutual-aid agreement that would be invoked if the situation becomes an emergency.

The cost and quantity of the water Soquel Creek would be willing to sell would depend on its own supplies. Only an amount of water that would not jeopardize Soquel Creek's customers would be sold, Johnson

said.

Soquel Creek encourages water conservation, he added, so customers will probably receive notes in the mail soon urging them to conserve water despite the district's relatively abundant supply.

In Watsonville, Water Department engineer John Nichols said it would take a drought the magnitude of that experienced from 1975-77 to create a problem because Watsonville gets its water from underground.

"We don't have a serious concern about the availability of water right now," Nichols said. "Eighty-five percent of our water comes from groundwater sources and it remains at a continuous level even through periods of dry rainfall."

Nichols did say that some sources of Watsonville water, such as Corrolitos Creek, are drying up faster this year than they normally do, however. But it would take an extended period of dryness to create a shortage, he said.

— Reporters Jennifer Koss and Dan Fitch also contributed to this report.

REFERENCE

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