

## Weather

Fair Through Thursday.  
Except Night And Morning  
Low Clouds. Local Drizzle.

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# Santa Cruz

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## Stiff SC Fines In Water Ration Plan

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Huge fines - one for \$7,000 - are now being assessed against violators of the city's emergency water-rationing ordinance.

The fines are based upon meter readings covering water use for the current billing period, the Santa Cruz City Council was told during a Tuesday night study session by Clay Nelson and John McGuire, water department officials.

By Tuesday afternoon the department had billed 1,291 accounts.

Of the single-family residential customers billed, 5 per cent got fines averaging \$240 each.

For all other categories of customers billed so far (multiple residential, commercial, industrial), 25 per cent violated their water allocations and face average fines of about \$375 each, the council was told.

In the case of the \$7,000 fine, Nelson said the violator, whom he did not name, was a motel that had plumbing problems plus inaccurate 1975 meter readings upon which its allocation of 70 per cent of 1975 water use is currently based.

However, under a department system for granting adjustments in the quantity of allocated rations where hardship or other inequities can be proved, the department officials have the power to cut down the amount of this or any other fine, or to eliminate it entirely.

The city has some 18,580 water customers, of whom about 800 single-family customers and some 491 other accounts have been billed to date.

But lest the council think the rationing program is not working effectively, McGuire, who is the department's superintendent of engineering and maintenance, reported the city has now saved so much water that it will be able to delay for a full month the expected

date it would commence drawing water from Loch Lomond reservoir supplies.

The council upheld the department's procedures for granting adjustments in allocations on the basis of provable hardships affecting the health, sanitation, safety and welfare of the individuals and organizations being hurt.

At the same time, though, Councilman Bert Muhly expressed concern that the credibility of the ration program could be hurt by ex post facto elimination or reduction of penalties for violations.

Muhly said, in part, the question before the council was "whether to take the recommendation of the water employees and decide to allow the after-the-fact variance procedures to operate, or whether it might be better to cut it off at the pass and give across-the-board amnesty."

Councilwoman Charlotte Melville said, "That weakens the purpose of the whole process."

Councilwoman Carole DePalma, who has a restaurant with her husband, Frank, predicted she would get a fine because she neglected to seek a variance for changed conditions in the hours of business.

Nelson reported that numerous meters checked in a 30-day period showed that homeowners will "drift over their allocation if they drink one more glass of water."

The council is concerned to have the rationing program work, but at the same time it could cause unemployment if it cuts back too severely in the business, industrial and agricultural areas, according to Melville. And Muhly is concerned that if the allocations are so unrealistic that many residential users face big fines, the council could face a massive revolt, a court test, a refusal to pay fines.

The council is due fairly soon to analyze the ordinance allocation and penalty system. The council pledged to make this analysis some 90 days after the ordinance became effective March 1.