Persistent drought conditions could compel Metropolitan to limit imported water supplies for our region this summer

Preparing for a potential fourth drought year, the Metropolitan Water District (MWD), Southern California’s wholesale water importer, announced that their board is expected to consider a possible supply allocation in April. If an allocation is enacted, MWD’s wholesale cutbacks would take effect July 1. “Southland consumers have responded to the water conservation challenge this past year. We all, however, need to be prepared to take water saving to another level this summer if water supply conditions don’t improve,” said MWD’s General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger.

According to the California Department of Water Resources, improved conditions are unlikely. The absence of precipitation in January, normally California’s wettest month, has combined with warmer-than-average temperatures to produce a dismally meager snowpack for a drought-stricken state. In normal years, the snowpack supplies about 30 percent of California’s water needs as it melts in the spring and early summer. The greater the snowpack water content, the greater the likelihood California’s reservoirs will receive ample runoff to meet the state’s water demand in the summer and fall. California’s statewide snowpack remains about 27 percent of normal for this time of year.

The good news is Vallecitos’ residential customers have trimmed their usage, according to a report released by the research group Equinox Center. Customers, on average, used 92 gallons of water per day in fiscal year 2014. This is 5 gallons per day less than they were using in 2010 and their efforts haven’t gone unnoticed.

“We congratulate residents on their hard work and appreciate all the changes they’ve implemented in their homes and businesses,” said Vallecitos Board President, Betty Evans. “We ask that they continue to aggressively conserve water as we move to the hottest, driest part of the year.”

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Frank Gehrke, Chief of California Cooperative Snow Surveys Program for the Department of Water Resources, measures the snowpack at Echo Summit, California, on January 29, 2015. The survey showed the snow pack to be 7.1 inches deep with a water content of 2.3 inches. In a normal year this location is usually covered in several feet of snow.
The District says that focusing conservation efforts outdoors provides more “bang for the buck,” since about half of residential consumption is used for landscaping. Water-efficient landscapes can cut outdoor water use by up to 70 percent through a combination of proper plant selection and irrigation technology. Rebates are available for many water efficient devices, including water efficient rotating sprinkler nozzles and weather-based irrigation controllers. The District also provides free landscape irrigation audits.

In August 2014, Vallecitos’ Board of Directors declared a Level 2 Drought Alert condition calling for mandatory water conservation measures. Per the District’s Drought Ordinance, landscape irrigation is limited to one day per week November through May and three days per week June through October. For more information about water-use restrictions, drought conditions and conservation-related resources, go to www.vwd.org/drought.

Local students find Vallecitos a water education destination

When it comes to furthering water education, many local teachers and students are starting to realize that the bus stops here. Offering a hands-on experience, many students from Palomar College to local elementary schools have indulged, making the District a field trip destination. Along with our program meeting specific educational requirements established by the State, each loaded yellow school bus or van that pulls up also presents an opportunity to introduce ourselves, the jobs we do, and services we provide to an impressionable segment of the community.

Educational presentations and tours focus on the following areas: Sources of water, conservation, water and wastewater operations, and sustainability.

If you are interested in participating or know of an organization that may benefit, please contact Grace Cardenas at gcardenas@vwd.org or (760) 744-0460, x 238.

Recently, a group of fourth grade students from High Tech Elementary North County visited the District to interview Vallecitos’ Public Information team for their community outreach project. They were surprised when Vallecitos’ General Manager, Dennis O. Lamb stopped in to answer questions and speak with them about the major challenges facing the industry. From left: Noe Hernandez, Dennis O. Lamb, Ian Buchanan and Peyton Stringer.
On May 13 from approximately 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Vallecitos will host another Water Academy – a full day, behind-the-scenes, bus-chartered tour of many of the facilities responsible for providing and treating the water that regularly circulates throughout the agency's 45 square-mile boundary.

With District staff serving as hosts, customers looking to expand their water knowledge will be treated to presentations, tours of the District's Water and Wastewater Collection Departments, Sustainable Demonstration Garden, and escorted to key service locations generally off limits to the public.

This includes the District's 33 million gallon Twin Oaks Reservoir No.1 and its 40 million gallon neighbor, Twin Oaks No. 2 - believed to be two of the largest, pre-stressed concrete storage tanks of their kind in the world.

Participants will also be treated to a first-hand look of the District’s award-winning Meadowlark Water Reclamation Facility in Carlsbad. This centerpiece to conservation features state-of-the-art technology to churn out up to 5 million gallons of recycled water a day, or almost 74 percent of the daily wastewater generated within the District’s boundaries.

The personal, guided tour will cover many of the new technologies and processes Meadowlark now employs after a $25 million upgrade to increase capacity, improve operation efficiency, and protect the environment by driving down the regional demand for imported water.

To register or find out more about the tour, contact Alicia Yerman at ayerman@vwd.org or (760) 744-0460, ext. 223. Hurry, spaces are limited and fill up fast!
Spring is here! Although there is cleaning to do, clocks to turn forward and newly budding plants to maintain, don’t forget it’s also time to join the tradition of entering the San Diego County California-Friendly Landscape Contest. This contest, sponsored by Vallecitos Water District as well as eight other local districts in the county, rewards local residents for brandishing water-wise landscapes that can achieve more beauty with less water. The submittal deadline is April 10, 2015.

Start by visiting the contest website at www.landscapecontest.com. Here you will be able to download applications, review rules, learn some techniques and see examples of past winners.

The first place winner will receive a $250 gift card to a local nursery, recognition from the Vallecitos Water District Board of Directors and further recognition at a regional awards ceremony.