

Beat: News

CALIFORNIA ORDERS FIRST-EVER MANDATORY WATER REDUCTIONS

GOV. BROWN ANNOUNCES EXECUTIVE ORDER

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USPA NEWS - Drought-ravaged California took drastic steps Wednesday to preserve what water it still has by ordering historic statewide measures that slash use for highway medians and golf courses and replace millions of acres of lawn with drought-resistant landscaping.

Gov. Jerry Brown stood in a brown patch of Sierra Nevada that should be buried in snow to announce a broad-based initiative to reduce water use by 25%, or 1.5 million acre-feet, over the next nine months. "It's a different world," Brown said. "We have to act differently."

Paltry mountain snowpack "" the lowest since 1950 -- means perilously low levels at state reservoirs, which supply 30% of California's May-through-November water to homeowners, farms, wineries and utilities.

During past water crises, such as the punishing drought of 1976, each water district was in charge of enacting measures to reduce water use.

This statewide mandate is a nod to both the severity of the situation and the likelihood of its persistence, says Dave Feldman, professor of policy, planning and design at the University of California at Irvine.

"The growing consensus is this may be the new norm for a few more years, so we'll have to get used to it," he says. "And you can't plan for a drought during a drought."

Months ago, California homeowners were urged by their local water utilities to aim for a 20% reduction in their water use. Fines accompanied actions such as washing off sidewalks and driveways or washing a car with an uncapped hose.

There is as yet no talk of a two-minute shower, but the new mandate is likely to increase the number of limitations on water use, with an accompanying increase in price for water used beyond a certain number of gallons per month.

"What this announcement does really is communicate to the people how serious this is," says Doug Parker, director of the California Institute for Water Resources. "We'll see more tiered pricing, more restrictions on landscaping. We need to deal with the simple uncertainty of how long the drought will last."

Article online:

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