

# EBMUD Imposes a Water Shortage Management Program

By Sophie Braccini



Gardening with native plants on a hillside in Orinda Photo Sophie Braccini

Last year, the East Bay Municipal Utility District asked its users for voluntary rationing. This year, after a second dry year, reduction in water use is mandatory to the tune of 19% for single family users and 12% for commercial users. Many residents and officials are taking steps to reduce their usage, while some question the fairness of the policy and even the management acumen of the agency.

A shortage of water is not new to California. Many battles have been fought over water, and some see potable water as the most precious and endangered resource of our planet. With rising consciousness about climate change and conservative use of our natural resources, when EBMUD declared a water shortage management program most users started brainstorming on how they could contribute. The financial consequence of not saving will certainly be an enticement. If water use does not decrease by 19% compared to the last 3-year average, residents will face a \$2 surcharge per unit (748 gallons) of water used. All customers will see a 10% increase of their bill to cover operating and drought costs; Meter read your EMBUD drought mailer carefully.

"We should all be concerned. There is not enough water in California," says Moraga resident Al Kyte, "but people in this country do not

like to be told how to live, so nothing will happen until it hurts." The biggest demand for water by homeowners is for outside watering; thirsty lawns are an easy target. Kyte is part of the "Bring Back the Natives" movement that advocates replacing water-demanding plants such as lawns with drought tolerant native plants. "We are just a few years behind Arizona where having lawns is prohibited," adds Kyte, "people here could keep their lawns on flat areas only and replace most of it with natives that are very attractive and do not require any water once established."

Gardening with drought resistant plants is only one of EBMUD's recommendations to help residents curtail their consumption. Orinda Council member Sue Severson is well aware of the requirements, "Our family is always conscientious about saving energy and water. Recently we added a water well on our property to use for landscape watering needs. Our family is also considering replacing the original toilet fixtures with the new low water ones," says Severson.

In Moraga, Council Member Ken Chew is confident that residents will conserve. "If the majority of the households in

Moraga participate in taking water conservation steps, we can play a major part in helping to conserve one of our most precious resources - clean and drinkable water." Chew recommends using less than 100 gallons of water per day per household, stop washing cars, set water sprinklers

to 3mn maximum and use it every other day, conserve water in toilets, hand wash dishes and take shorter showers, turning off the water as you soap.

City governments are making efforts as well. Orinda Mayor Victoria Smith is proud to point out, "Some might say that the City of Orinda was prescient in designing the City Hall. The Orinda City Hall toilets use dual flush technology reducing water use in bathrooms that provide substantial water saving. All City Hall bathroom sinks utilize automatic low flow hand faucets that also contribute to the building's water efficiency and conservation. Overall, the anticipated water usage is 30% below traditional office building use of the same size," said the Mayor, adding that water conservation will be increased in other public facilities.

Despite this general willingness to save water, some residents question EBMUD management. "We heard about residents who said they saved as much as they could when our warning was issued last year and that they don't see how they could reduce by another 19%," said Charles Hardy, spokesperson for EBMUD. Since it sounded a bit too much like punishing the virtuous, the agency is considering taking into account usage reduction that was made last year and averaging those users' consumption starting before the date last April when the first recommendation was issued. The Board will decide on this measure in July.

Some residents go further and question the long-term management strategy of the agency. "Our major tool in time of drought is the Freeport Regional Water Project," responds Hardy, "after years of legal battle we won the right to use water from the Sacramento River in times of drought. The agreement will be in effect by the end of 2009."

Whatever your opinion about EBMUD management wisdom is, this is a good time to take advantage of the agency's rebate on appliances that will save water and energy. Currently \$150 rebates are available to replace toilets and washing machines. The agency's web site contains information on the rebates and a list of advice to reduce consumption, go to [www.ebmud.com/conserving\\_&\\_recycling/water\\_smart\\_tips/default.htm](http://www.ebmud.com/conserving_&_recycling/water_smart_tips/default.htm).



Straight-Reading Meter