

Life in LAMORINDA

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; read your EMBUD drought mailer carefully.

"We should all be concerned. There is not enough



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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 3mm 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.

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