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Lamorindans react to the EBMUD water rate hike

By Nick Marnell



Residents' EBMUD bills are taking a hike upward. Photo provided

that," he said.

Jessica Shafer, a Moraga mother of three, personified Coleman's stance. "It sounds like we did a better job of managing our water than they did managing their money," Shafer said of the district. "Shouldn't we get benefits for working extra hard to save water?"

Seemingly resigned to the rate increase was Sue Porter of Orinda. "No, I'm not surprised," she lamented. "And after how hard we worked to save water."

EBMUD spokeswoman Andrea Pook blamed the drought for one-third of the rate hike, with infrastructure needs accounting for one-third and operational expenses for the remainder. "A drought is difficult for everyone," she said. "We're still seeing the impacts - like water quality."

Pook said that the recent high levels of trihalomethanes in the Orinda water supply and the sour taste of Lamorinda water in 2015 were coincidental to the rate increase and not veiled threats to users. "The taste changes were a result of the drought," she said. "And the rate increases affect everyone, not just customers in Lamorinda." The district plans treatment additions at the Orinda and Lafayette Water Treatment Plants to address what it calls disinfection byproduct formation.

Some took the rate increase in stride. "If they're repairing old pipelines, I'm all right with that," said Nancy N. Hom of Moraga. "As long as they maintain a hardship exemption for those who cannot afford the increase." EBMUD offers a Customer Assistance Program to help pay a portion of the water bill for qualified low-income residential customers.

For the average single-family customer who uses 200 gallons of water per day, the bills will rise approximately \$4.34 per month this fiscal year, and by \$4.63 per month next fiscal year, according to the district. Sewer rates will rise 5 percent each year as well, but EBMUD does not have wastewater customers in Lamorinda.

Pook confirmed a sliver of good news for Lamorindans: The district did not raise the \$7 daily parking rate at the Lafayette Reservoir. "And tap water still runs about a penny a gallon," she said.

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