

California Governor Orders Statewide Water Cutbacks

California Governor Jerry Brown, in his most sweeping action to combat a devastating multi-year drought, ordered residents and businesses on Wednesday to cut water use by 25 percent in the first mandatory statewide reduction in California history.

The cuts mean industrial parks and golf courses must immediately cut a quarter of their water use on ornamental turf, and homeowners will be pressed to replace thirsty lawns with drought-tolerant landscaping. Farmers, already making do with less water for irrigation, will be exempt.

The move comes as California's snowpack, which generally provides about a third of the state's water, is at its lowest level on record in a sign the state's drought, now entering its fourth year, is far from over.

Standing in a field of dry, limp grass at a snow-monitoring station in the Sierra Nevada mountains, the fourth-term Democratic governor said the cutbacks would save some 1.5 million acre-feet of water over the next nine months.

"We're standing on dry ground and we should be standing on 5 feet (1.5 meters) of snow," said Brown, whose two non-consecutive stints in office have coincided with two of the state's worst droughts. "This is rationing. We're just doing it through the different water districts."

Brown said the state would develop rebate plans to help families and businesses remove a planned 50 million square feet (4.6 million square meters) of lawns, and replace old appliances with newer, more water-efficient models.

The cuts will be implemented by state and local water agencies, and different parts of the state will have to reduce

their water use more than others, because some had already cut way back, Brown said.

Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the state Water Resources Control Board, said regulators would not hesitate to issue fines of up to \$10,000 a day to water districts that do not succeed in implementing the cutbacks.

Many of the rules are still being developed, Marcus said, but among those already contained in the governor's order are a ban on lawns in new housing unless drip or microspray systems are in place.

FARMING EXEMPTION

Brown also ordered the agencies that supply the state's vast agricultural sector with irrigation water to develop detailed plans for managing water during the drought.

Farmers will not be held to the 25 percent reduction, officials said, because farmers had already been deeply affected by the state's moves to release less water than usual from reservoirs during the last three years of drought, as well as periodic restrictions on pumping from rivers and creeks.

Many growers fallowed thousands of acres (hectares) of cropland last year amid high prices for water and a reduction in the amount they were allowed to buy from state and federal water projects in the fragile San Joaquin-Sacramento River Delta.

Hundreds of thousands of additional acres will likely lay fallow this year as well, and farmers are expected to remove trees and vineyards that are irrigation-dependent, said California Secretary of Food and Agriculture Karen Ross.

Brown signed emergency legislation last week that fast-tracked over \$1 billion in funding for drought relief and water

infrastructure within the parched state.

The proposed legislation would appropriate voter-approved bond funds to speed up water projects and provide aid to struggling California March, the Water Resources Control Board imposed new drought regulations, outlawing lawn watering within 48 hours of rain and prohibiting water from being served in restaurants unless a customer requests it.

In California, the drought lingers despite storms that brought some respite in December and February. The storms helped replenish some of the state's reservoirs, although most still have less water than historical averages show is typical.

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