

Richard P. Santos, Chairman
Board of Directors
Santa Clara Valley Water District
5750 Almaden Expressway
San Jose, CA 95118

RE: Water Conservation
Proposed Resolution to Call for Fifteen Percent Voluntary Water Conservation
From September 30, 2010 through June 30, 2011

Dear Chairman Santos:

The proposed action by the Board of Directors to adopt a resolution calling for fifteen percent voluntary water conservation from September 30, 2010 through June 30, 2011 continues the Board's pattern of mixed and confusing messages to the residents of Santa Clara County when clear and consistent water conservation guidance is required. Great Oaks Water Company urges the Board to reconsider this policy initiative and provide better public service through thoughtful, long-range and effective water conservation policies in alignment with those of the State of California.

In 2007, the Board called upon residents of Santa Clara County to voluntarily reduce water use by ten percent. In March of 2009, the Board called for fifteen percent mandatory conservation, and in December of 2009, the Board extended fifteen percent mandatory conservation through June 30, 2010. Then, in July of 2010, the Board adopted a resolution calling for ten percent mandatory conservation through September 30, 2010. Now, the proposed resolution calls for fifteen percent voluntary conservation through June 30, 2011.

While the current proposal is to change course from the current ten percent mandatory water conservation to fifteen percent voluntary conservation, the justifications for this policy change include many of the same justifications used by the Board to require fifteen percent mandatory conservation on March 24, 2009 and December 8, 2009. Essentially, the Board employs the same rationale when calling for either mandatory or voluntary water conservation, and when setting the goals at either ten or fifteen percent. In fact, the proposed resolution recognizes this result by stating:

WHEREAS, the citizens of Santa Clara County have responded favorably to the District's call for short-term drought response conservation since 2007, helping to preserve water supply reserves.

Another confusing aspect of the Board's proposed voluntary fifteen percent water conservation resolution is its reference to water use in 2004. It is safe to say that almost everyone in Santa Clara County has no recollection or record of his or her water use six years ago, rendering the fifteen percent goal virtually meaningless.

It is also inconsistent. Neither mandatory conservation resolution in 2009 referenced a base year, leaving the impression that water use under the mandatory reductions would be compared to water use in the prior year (2008), rather than to five years earlier (2004).

Moreover, the staff materials submitted to the Board for review on this subject make no reference to 2004 as the base year for water conservation goals and comparisons. For example, staff materials considered at the August 31, 2010 "workshop" on water conservation and rate structures contained no references whatsoever to 2004 water usage.

In order to make conservation goals and comparisons meaningful, the Board should advise the public on annual (short-term) water conservation objectives, rather than on long-term objectives lacking in meaningful reference points. It is far easier to both understand and accomplish a goal of water use reductions over a one-year period than to expect water users to remember water use six years ago and base current water use decisions on those memories, if any.

Finally, as you know, District actions should be consistent with the State objectives to achieve twenty percent reductions in water use by the year 2020. It is entirely unclear how the proposed resolution is designed to align with State objectives.

The Board has, over the last three years, made several policy decisions on water conservation. Some were mandatory, while others were voluntary, but all were different even though based upon the same rationale. Rather than continue this unfortunate inconsistency and confusion, Great Oaks urges the Board to adopt a more thoughtful approach that gives clear guidance to water users and is consistent with State objectives.

Any change from "mandatory" to "voluntary" will tell the public that restrictions on water usage are no longer needed. Just like "voluntary" speed limits, "voluntary" water use would be meaningless. If the same term is consistently used, then no explanations for the different terms are required.