

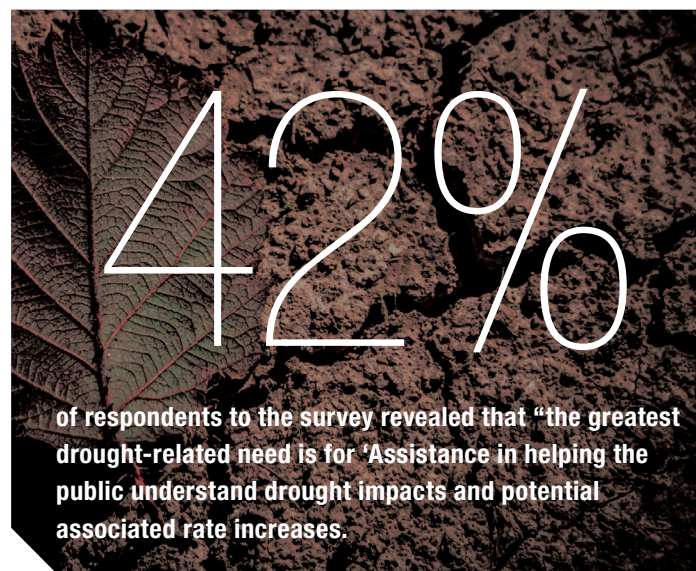
What Our Members Are Saying About Drought Impacts

The drought in Southern California is being presented through various public channels as a series of mixed messages.

The governor issued an emergency drought declaration and regional water agencies are asking customers to implement “voluntary” conservation efforts. These efforts, meanwhile, contain no real measure of impact. This series of mixed messaging results in a greater awareness of the drought, but a deficiency in the understanding of the drought’s actual impacts in what agencies are doing to protect supplies and, ultimately, in what will drive water rates higher.

During February and March, an online drought survey was distributed to San Gabriel Valley Water Association members, with 26 of the region’s 32 water retailers responding. According to the survey, the Watermaster’s Safe Yield Determination is the leading indicator of drought impacts for San Gabriel Valley water suppliers. The second leading indicator, at 23%, is members’ monitoring their own well readings showing basin water levels below the average ranges.

According to SGVWA Executive Secretary Anthony Zampielo, 42% of respondents to the survey



revealed that “the greatest drought-related need is for ‘Assistance in helping the public understand drought impacts and potential associated rate increases.’”

Locally conserving as much water as possible is the first method by which agencies can delay either costly treatment or importing water. This is why conservation is key. ■



SAN GABRIEL VALLEY WATER ASSOCIATION

Topic: Listening to Our Members and Their Customers About the Drought

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Introducing Our Inaugural Newsletter



First and foremost, thank you for your membership in the Association! Your membership in the Association means a lot and the Board of Directors looks forward to representing your interests for years to come. The Association is excited to announce that our staff has been working on the implementation of new and improved communication tools that will serve to keep our members better informed on the Association’s activities and issues of importance. This quarter’s edition is the first of many forthcoming quarterly newsletters.

In addition to a newsletter, staff has improved the Association’s website which now includes a member’s only section for accessing position papers and legislative analysis, among other items.

We hope you will benefit from our improved services and are open to your comments and feedback. If you have any suggestions or items you would like included on our quarterly updates or website, please contact us! We are here to serve you!

Dan Arrighi, *President*

You Ask, We Deliver



As we assembled our inaugural membership newsletter we asked you, our members, what you wanted to see. You told us that you wanted information in the newsletter that you could pass along to your retail customers. As you will see, our recent survey of our membership showed that foremost in everyone’s mind is the current drought and creating a consistent conservation message for the public. Hence, the first newsletter is geared to helping you speak to your customers about the drought and the related factors that affect their water rates.

We have also been following other issues statewide as this current crisis and developments in the Central Valley have greatly heightened concerns in Sacramento about how Groundwater is managed in California. Again, we are going to provide you with information to help your customers know what is at stake.

As the year progresses we will be soliciting your input and ideas on our quarterly meeting as we hope to educate our membership and attendees on key water policy issues that drive water decisions in the San Gabriel Valley.

Anthony Zampielo, *Executive Secretary*

What People Are Thinking

During the SGVWA's Quarterly Luncheon meeting on March 12th one of our panelists, Irma Muñoz, presented the topic: An Uninformed Public.

Muñoz is President of Mujeres De La Tierra, a neighborhood driven group that strives for environmental quality and economic equity. She is also vice-chair of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. Muñoz's presentation included a video with interviews of Los Angeles area residents in various settings where they were asked drought-related questions, including:

- Do you believe we are in a drought?
- Where do you think your water comes from?
- Do you think it is important to save water?
- Who or what would you trust as a reliable source of information about water conservation and the drought?

While answers varied, overall they revealed that members of the public are somewhat unaware of where their water comes from and are doubtful of the information they read about the drought.

Muñoz stated that, for the most part, "People, regardless of where they live in the area, think that the LADWP provides their water, and the news about some water agencies has not been very flattering especially when it comes to water rates."

The drought warnings in the news, therefore, come across as an excuse to increase water rates, some respondents said.

Overall, the interviews revealed that customers do not want to find out about the drought from the media but would rather hear from their suppliers in a very direct and honest manner. Research conducted by

“Customers are more accepting of higher water rates when they realize that the drought goes beyond a matter of supply versus demand. Water suppliers must protect public health and safety as well.”

- Anthony Zampielo
SGVWA Executive Secretary

Muñoz and her organization strongly indicates that customers trust their water purveyor over the media and even scientific experts. This presents a great opportunity to convey a uniform message. How water agencies communicate about water and the drought in consistent terms is the key.

SGVWA Executive Secretary Anthony Zampielo stated, "Customers are more accepting of higher water rates when they realize that the drought goes beyond a matter of supply versus demand. Water suppliers must protect public health and safety as well."

Customers do not necessarily draw a clear line between different agencies, but tend to group everyone together with those who have been in the news. Therefore, it is important to educate customers that what is being done by their water supplier is positive and that measures are being implemented to alleviate drought impacts while also addressing water quality and conservation. ■

Helping Customers Understand Real Drought Impacts

In order for customers to better understand drought-related water rate impacts, they need to be aware of what factors impact the cost of water supply. This becomes even more important as costs increase during a drought.

Protecting Water Quality Is Our Mission

The greatest impact on local water rates under normal conditions and particularly during a drought is the cost of maintaining water quality. Lower precipitation levels result in more water being drawn from our basins than cannot be naturally replenished. This results in lower overall basin water levels. When water is drawn from greater depths within a well column the water extracted is being produced from a reduced screened surface area. This can increase concentrations of undesirable constituents in the water produced. Additionally, the more power is consumed the higher the water has to be lifted. Lower Basin levels equate to higher energy costs.

All domestic drinking water served in the San Gabriel Valley is required to meet the highest quality standards in the country. Higher concentrations of contaminants means higher treatment costs for removal or blending local wells with more expensive imported water to meet standards.

Delaying Drought-Related Rate Impacts

Conservation is Key: the more we conserve, the less we need to pump.

Maintaining healthy groundwater levels through water conservation is a key part of maintaining costs. In reality, this is a race against the clock. The longer the drought lasts and the more water we conserve, the longer we will be able to avoid unplanned rate increases.

Strategy for Informing Customers

SGVWA Executive Director, Anthony Zampielo, is a strong advocate of using water bills and bill stuffers to promote programs and provide tips on how to conserve. Agency websites are also excellent front line tools for informing the public. The SGVWA has developed this simple graphic that will help your customers understand how your utility must manage costs related to maintaining water quality and what water utilities do on a daily basis to protect public health. It was developed to fit as a banner on most websites or as a simple insert in your water bill mailings. ■

What Affects Your Water Rates During a Drought

The three factors that affect your water rates during a drought are:

- The need to purchase expensive water from Northern California "imported water" and/or;
- The need to treat water from lower well levels where contaminants are more concentrated;
- Rationing triggered by less available supplies.

