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EBMUD announces Stage 2 drought mandates

By Vera Kochan

The East Bay Municipal Utility District announced strategies to this year's drought emergency following its April 26 board of directors meeting. The decisions should come as no surprise to customers who have been expecting mandates to take affect once the insufficient rainy season had ended. In a 6-1 vote, the board chose to elevate its drought response by issuing a mandatory 10% district-wide water reduction target. The 10% reduction had previously been voluntary with customers managing to save approximately 7% of water usage.

EBMUD's source for most of its water supply comes from the Mokelumne River Watershed. Between January through March, only 2.5 inches of rain was accounted for, creating the driest first three months of any year in EBMUD's nearly 100-year history.

According to a statement in March, "EBMUD, like other urban agencies, is required to maintain a Water Shortage Contingency Plan that outlines the District's drought response. EBMUD's plan reflects decades of investment and planning for multi-year droughts and is based on local hydrologic conditions and our customer usage patterns. When water storage levels are low, the EBMUD board asks customers to conserve and approve the purchase of supplemental supplies."

The statement adds that, since October 2021, EBMUD had brought in supplemental water through a contract with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which accounts for almost an additional 20% of its annual supplies. As of the end of April, EBMUD's reservoirs are 71% full and not expected to get any better once the Sierra Nevada snow melts.

In an April 26 statement, the board of directors' Stage 2 drought declaration includes: "Mandated 10% water use reduction District-wide as compared to 2020, and review progress towards achieving this goal in November; Reinstatement of the Excessive Use Penalty Ordinance. The ordinance sets a threshold of roughly 1,646 gallons of water per day for households. Households who exceed the threshold will receive one warning, and then will face fines of \$2 for every 748 gallons of water above the threshold; Updated water restrictions, including limiting outdoor watering to three times per week, prohibiting washing down sidewalks and driveways, and requiring restaurants and cafes to only provide water upon request, among other provisions."

EBMUD could also consider imposing a drought surcharge of up to 8% on water use charges (not the entire bill) to cover the expense of purchasing supplemental water supplies. This decision was scheduled to come up for a vote during the May 10 board meeting, after press time. All emergency surcharges will remain in effect as long as the drought persists.

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