



Eye on the Environment: To have enough water, reuse more of it

By Frank Royer
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There is little doubt the current water shortage has developed into one of the top issues of political, agricultural and residential concern. California went from a June 2008 “declaration of drought” to a February 2009 “drought emergency,” when the governor urged each of us to cut water use by 20 percent.

As the crisis continues, the result has been mandated water restrictions in many parts of Ventura County that have changed the way we live. While conservation efforts are essential, they alone will not solve the crisis.

With the cost of imported water rising faster than most had anticipated, many local water agencies and cities — already under reduced imported-water allocations — are getting less supply at a higher cost. Most providers will have no choice but to pass the costs along to their customers.

Local providers are looking for ways to expand water resources to minimize the need for imported water. Additional well development, desalination of surface water and increased use of recycled water for irrigation are all being investigated as ways to become more self-reliant, with recycled water potentially being the most promising long-term solution. With dwindling water supplies, water reuse for irrigation must become common.

Much of Ventura County’s water comes from the snowpack in Northern California. As much as 70 percent of this expensive water is used for irrigation of our yards, medians, golf courses, agriculture and public areas. Using recycled water for irrigation reserves this increasingly precious resource for indoor and drinking use.

Many Ventura County wastewater agencies already produce recycled water at the high standards necessary for irrigation use, but without the necessary distribution system, they must discharge it into local streams that flow to the ocean. Though much progress has been made, we are using only 17 percent of the available recycled water in Ventura County.

The Camrosa Water District is the leading recycled-water distributor in the county, delivering about 70 percent of all the recycled water now used. This reclaimed water goes to CSU Channel Islands, local agriculture and nurseries, and most recently, for Leisure Village’s greenbelt and golf course.

While it took capital investment, the conversion from potable to nonpotable irrigation at Leisure Village will more than pay for itself, especially with the cost of water increasing at such a rapid pace.

That message is beginning to resonate among water agencies and their customers. For example:

- Camrosa is completing a master plan that includes the infrastructure to carry recycled water for landscape irrigation to new areas of the Santa Rosa Valley.
- The city of Oxnard is building an advanced water purification facility, which is projected to break ground this year and begin delivering recycled water by 2012.
- The Ventura County Association of Water Agencies formed a recycled water subcommittee to promote water reuse.

The impetus behind these efforts and others is the need to develop and protect water resources to assure Ventura County residents a safe, sustainable supply. Developing water self-reliance will occur only with an unwavering commitment and a serious investment in water infrastructure.

— *Frank Royer is general manager of the Camrosa Water District and sits on the Ventura County Association of Water Agencies' recycled water subcommittee. Representatives of government or nonprofit agencies who want to submit articles on environmental topics for this column should contact David Goldstein at 658-4312 or david.goldstein@ventura.org.*

On the Net:

<http://www.camrosa.com>

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