

Most Lamorinda Residents Not Feeling Immediate Drought Impact

Why this drought response is different than the drought of the '70s

By Adam Blake



Photo Jennifer Wake

Although the current drought is similar to that of the 1970s, East Bay Municipal Utility District Board of Directors member John Coleman explained why Bay Area residents aren't seeing the same sort of regulations they did 30 years ago, thanks to EBMUD diversifying its portfolio and drawing water from multiple sources.

"The board over a period of 20 plus years has made conscious decisions to spend money on recycled water and groundwater," Coleman said. "We've spent in the last decade alone over a billion dollars that has helped us get through the drought we're in today."

A combination of EBMUD infrastructure investment and water-conserving technologies like in-home fixtures and appliances in addition to people's voluntary cut backs on usage has achieved an impressive amount of conservation.

Since 1976, the water provider has cut back over 30 percent. Today EBMUD uses roughly 165 million gallons a day in a population of almost 1.4 million people versus the '70s drought when over 220 million gallons day were used by a population of 1.1 million.

While Gov. Jerry Brown has set a 20 percent reduction in usage as a goal, EBMUD has adopted a 10 percent water conservation plan, which

has proven successful considering customers have cut back slightly more than that.

"A lot of our customers have cut back so much already that it's becoming more difficult to have a discretionary amount to cut back further," said Coleman. "This is one way of thanking the customers, our rate payers, for having put up with the rate increases that have allowed us to keep it at 10 percent versus 20 percent."

Many residents, especially those who remember the strict regulations of the '76-'77 drought are surprised at the communities' lack of activism in conserving water. Local resident Marilyn Finn, who was in the area during the '70s drought, said she was surprised at people's lack of response to this drought. She also thinks the community would benefit from increased regulations, a step closer to the many sacrifices people were required to make 38 years ago. "I have been very disappointed at the length of time it is taking our county to put water-usage restrictions in place and back them up with enforcement," Finn said.

Coleman disagreed, saying that future regulations may be necessary if the drought continues, but today it is not necessary because they have paid to diversify their portfolio. "Some places in the state have not done that, and that's why they're facing a severe situation right now,"

Coleman said.

This can be seen in numerous towns outside of Contra Costa County. In Pleasanton, all residents are required to reduce their water usage by at least 25 percent. Users who do not comply face drought surcharges on their monthly bills.

Although EBMUD has not resorted to methods such as this except for extreme cases, if the drought continues it is likely that Gov. Brown will enforce new regulations that EBMUD will be required to comply with.

Some Lamorinda residents have taken the initiative to organize and help educate the public to promote water conservation. Sustainable Lafayette for example has taken a leading role in getting the community involved with water conservation.

Co-chair of the Sustainable Food Committee and Tip of the Month coordinator of Sustainable Lafayette Linda Riebel is "impressed in general by Lafayette's commitment to the environment" but still finds it important to educate and raise awareness.

The group publishes tips on how to save water and organizes local events. Most recently, they hosted "A Taste of Water Awareness" at Rising Loafer Cafe and Bakery on Mt. Diablo Boulevard where they discussed food recipes that have a lower water footprint.

Just as there is more work to be done on the community front, Coleman noted that EBMUD will continue to develop its water diversification, expanding groundwater storage, water transfers, and recycled water. "We know that future droughts are going to come and we want to protect our customers as much as possible," Coleman said.

If the drought persists, Lamorinda residents may need to make greater sacrifices or adjust their daily routine. Coleman warns it is important to stay cognizant of the current crisis and importance of responsible water usage.

"Use it wisely," he said, "because we don't know what we'll have for tomorrow."



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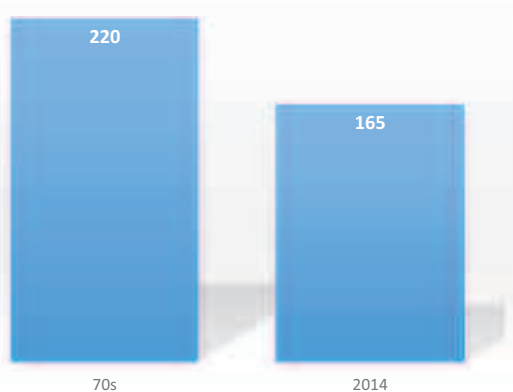
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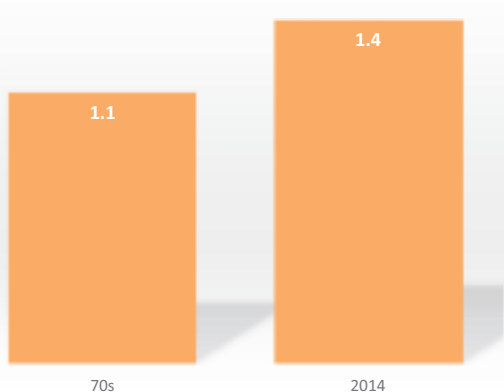
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