

Life in LAMORINDA

Drought: Are We Meeting Our Goals?

By Sophie Braccini



San Leandro Reservoir view from Pinehurst Road last Sunday

Photo Andy Scheck

In September the single-family residences served by the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) missed their water usage objective of a 19% reduction by just one point, and the global goal of a 15% overall reduction for the agency was met.

The numbers are similar for preceding months, however if the coming winter is as dry as the two previous winters, EBMUD could have to resort to extreme rationing, which could mean a 50% cut back for single-family users. The solution: Save now and hope for a wet winter!

"I am still optimistic," said EBMUD elected Board Member Kathy Foulkes, "we are very grateful for all the efforts people have made and our agency is working on many fronts to maintain a high quality service for its constituency."

For some, the 19% felt like a huge burden. Out of the 1.3 million customers served by EBMUD, 7,300 have applied for an adjustment and 90% of them have received it. According to Foulkes those are for example people with children who just bought the house of an old couple, families where kids are coming back to live, per-

sons with a medical problem or individuals who are doing everything they can already. The cases were examined by EBMUD Conservation Department, which will conduct spot checks.

The industrial users exceeded their 5% reduction objective by reducing their consumption by 13%. Foulkes attributes this to the partnerships that take place between her agency and these users. "The industrial clients are the category who consumes the most water," says Foulkes, "for example the refineries need enormous quantities of water to cool down their cooling tower, or Coca-Cola which uses our water for its sodas as well as for its bottled water." That's where partnerships operate. EBMUD is processing recycled water: twice treated sewage water, appropriate to swim in but not for drinking. Such water is used in the Richmond cooling tower refinery.

EBMUD is working on many others venues to secure and improve our supply. Some projects are just in infancy such as the feasibility of a desalination plant, other are closer like the use of ground water available in the San Lorenzo area or Sacramento County, and by

December of 2009 we will have access to the water of the Sacramento basin in case of drought.

In the meantime, EBMUD recommends that all of its customers continue their efforts. If you own a pool, install a pool cover, and don't forget that re-filling pools has been banned. The agency asks that we do not forget to turn off our irrigation systems as soon as the rain starts and that for the time being, we water no more than one day a week. We are asked to address indoor water waste by checking for leaky toilets - notorious water wasters - and putting a stop to running water in sinks while doing dishes or brushing teeth and limiting showers to 5 minutes. "I personally recycle my own grey water," says Foulkes, who met her 19% objective, "I have a bucket in my shower to collect the water that runs before it gets warm enough, and one in my kitchen sink." She believes that without the use of that water to irrigate her garden, it would have died.

EBMUD's Board of Directors will reconvene in April to examine the level of the snow pack and make a decision for the coming year.

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