



# CALIFORNIA'S WATER: A CRISIS WE CAN'T IGNORE

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## CONSERVATION CONSTRAINTS

California's water agencies have done a good job of stretching water supplies through efficiency programs and consumer conservation efforts. Unfortunately, these efforts are not enough to offset the collective impacts of drought, climate change, increased population demands and potential natural disasters.

### **Conservation Can Lessen—Not Avert—the Crisis**

Local water agencies offer programs to help their customers use water efficiently and to make water-smart home improvement and landscaping decisions. Investments in conservation have allowed Southern California, for example, to use roughly the same amount of water today that is used two decades ago, despite tremendous population growth.

But even aggressive local conservation programs cannot entirely offset the effects of recent court-ordered reductions in water deliveries, ongoing drought and climate change.

Most local water agencies are issuing pleas to their customers to voluntarily conserve. In San Diego, consumers are being asked to save 20 gallons of water a day. Some water agencies, citing concerns about low rainfall, dangerously low statewide water reserves and the threat of reduced water supplies, are going even further. The City of Long Beach, for example, imposed strict water conservation rules in September for city residents and businesses.

### **Water Recycling**

Local water agencies have been on the leading edge of water recycling for decades, and today they recycle well over 500,000 acre-feet of water a year. These programs help reduce demands for freshwater supplies and cut down on wastewater discharges into sensitive ecosystems. Water agencies from San Jose to Monterey to Orange County run some of the state's largest recycling programs. In the San Diego region, 16 water agencies are planning to use more than 32,300 acre-feet of recycled water annually by 2010 in order to meet the region's water supply demand.

### **Desalination**

Once dismissed as too expensive, seawater desalination is in the news again as California water suppliers consider options for meeting future water needs. Thanks to recent advances in technology, turning ocean water into drinking water is not as energy-intensive as it was a decade ago. There are several small plants currently operating, but most produce less than 1,000 acre-feet of water a year. While there are no large scale plants in operation today, there are several in the planning stages, although they will not be online for some time.

For more information, please visit [www.calwatercrisis.org](http://www.calwatercrisis.org).