

NEWS CLIPS

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Resource Conservation and Public Outreach

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06A27D

Source: The Acorn 2/11/16

Testing the raging water

On Jan. 31 at approximate 12:30 p.m. and at the height of the rain and windstorm, I decided, on my return from Costco, to drive down Lake Lindero Road from T.O to Canwood in order to get a glimpse of the torrent that would presumably be flowing in the drainage canal that flows under the road near that intersection.

To my utter disbelief, as I approached I noticed two girls, one about 10 or 11 and the other about 5 years old, tightly holding hands for balance and barefoot, starting to attempt to traverse the raging water, which has a steep drop off merely feet from where they were walking. They had entered the water and were about eight feet from the “shore.”

I pulled over and shouted for them to get out of the water and, thankfully, they promptly acquiesced.

I think they both may have been somewhat relieved to vacate their plan as if they had dared each other into their foolish endeavor.

I admonished the kids to never do something so foolish and watched them as they crossed the street toward the townhomes on the southeast corner.

While certainly these—and all—kids must be better monitored, the town should look into gating the access to the canal to avoid a potential tragedy from what seems to constitute “an attractive nuisance.”

Michael Weiss
Agoura

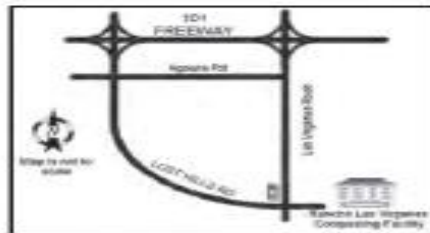
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When it comes to saving water, Southern Californians are tapped out — or are they?

Source: LA Times 2/10/16

After months of responding to calls to save water, Southern Californians say they've hit a wall.

Nearly 9 in 10 respondents say they strongly or somewhat agree that "I've already cut back on water use at my home as much as I can" and "There's not much more I can do to save water," according to a recent survey commissioned by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

A majority also said they are willing to decrease their consumption.

"They know what they're doing [to conserve], and they believe it's everything, but when you start giving them other ideas ... they realize they're not," said Cynthia Kurtz, an MWD board member. "So drought fatigue, in a sense, means they've run out of ideas, and we need to keep reinforcing that there are other things they can do."

Interest in [the drought](#) surged last spring after Gov. Jerry Brown imposed California's first mandatory reduction in water use. Residents ripped out their lawns in record numbers and met the 25% mandate each month from June to September.

But recently, statewide water conservation has lagged. Californians failed to meet the 25% mandate in October, November and December, though the cumulative savings remain on target.

Many Southern Californians have hoped that a strong El Niño would bring above-average rains and relieve some of the pressure. So far, that hasn't panned out, and rainfall in the region is still below average.

The MWD hired EMC Research to conduct the survey, which measured people's attitudes and awareness of the drought. The researchers called about 1,000 people within the MWD service area during two weeks in December and also conducted an online survey that 800 people took during the same period. A summary of the results was released Monday.

The survey found that 62% of respondents said they "strongly agree" that they had saved as much water as they could, while 26% "somewhat agree."

Kurtz said the agency will use the survey results as a guide for how to adapt future outreach to changing attitudes.

One way to combat so-called drought fatigue, Kurtz said, is to express gratitude for the conservation efforts made so far.

"People get tired of being told they have to do more, they have to do more, so as part of that message, we also have to thank them for what they have done," Kurtz said, "and then promptly push them to do more."

Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the State Water Resources Control Board, said she wasn't disappointed by the results of the survey because Southern Californians have done well so far with saving water.

"I would think a significant chunk of those folks probably really have done a lot, and there may be others that probably don't realize there's more that they could do, so it's an education and engagement challenge," Marcus said.

Tracy Quinn, senior policy analyst at the Natural Resources Defense Council, agreed that there is an education gap and said it ought to be of concern if people think there is no more to be done to conserve water at home.

"It's clear that there's a lot more we could be doing," Quinn said, adding that residents continue to use drinking water "outside at a level that isn't really sustainable in this sort of new normal California climate."

Quinn said respondents might have been focused on ways they have changed their behavior, rather than on more concrete steps such as replacing appliances with high-efficiency products.

"There's no act too small," Quinn said. "Every drop really does count in this drought emergency."

Three years later, supervisors may revisit plan to raise funds for stormwater projects

Source: LA Times 2/9/16

Three years ago, an attempt to raise money for regional projects to capture and treat stormwater went nowhere.

Homeowners, businesses and school districts opposed the proposed parcel fee, and Los Angeles County supervisors killed a proposed initiative before it could go to voters in a countywide mail-only ballot for property owners.

Now, with heightened attention on water supplies and flood control as a result of the drought and El Niño, some local officials and activists want to try again.

Environmentalists and public officials have talked about trying another countywide ballot measure next year to pay for stormwater capture infrastructure, county Supervisor [Sheila Kuehl](#) said. "The county just doesn't have enough money in its coffers to do all the work that's necessary. We will need, I think, to go to the public for it," she said.

In the Los Angeles River watershed, only about 15% of stormwater is captured, cleaned up and placed back in the water supply. The rest goes into the ocean, a loss of millions of gallons each year.

Stormwater management plans developed by the county and cities in the Los Angeles area in response to new permitting requirements add up to an estimated \$20 billion over the next 20 years.

At the time of the previous proposed initiative, those plans did not yet exist. The annual parcel fee would have ranged from \$54 for an average single-family home to thousands of dollars for large commercial properties, raising about \$290 million annually.

At a meeting last month, county supervisors — including [Michael D. Antonovich](#), who adamantly opposed the previous proposed parcel fee — expressed chagrin at the amount of water lost in the first storm of the season. "This is a very serious problem," Antonovich said. "We are now in a drought, and we continue to allow water to go to the ocean."

Tony Bell, a spokesman for Antonovich, said he opposes "unfunded mandates from the state and feds" to meet clean water standards and opposed the previous measure because it "had no local support — nor did it identify projects" and still fell short of raising the money needed to meet clean water mandates.

But Bell said the supervisor "may be open to a targeted, equitable, bottom-up proposal that has local support" from cities, businesses and community groups.

Supervisor Hilda Solis said she was interested in exploring a funding measure. Los Angeles Mayor [Eric Garcetti](#)'s spokeswoman, Connie Llanos, also signaled interest.

"Mayor Garcetti knows we need to reduce our dependence on imported water, expand our local supplies and capture more stormwater," she said in a statement. "We look forward to continuing our discussions and evaluating options in the coming months."

The last attempt at a stormwater funding measure came under fire because it contained no end date or list of specific projects. In addition, school districts complained that it would cut into already tight budgets, and some property owners were upset because the hearing notice and protest form for the proposed measure looked like junk mail and they threw them away.

Some of the groups that objected said they still have concerns.

"The previous stormwater proposal was flawed in both its structure, lack of transparency and accountability, as well as a voting process that did not ensure educated voters making an informed decision," said Ruben Gonzalez, senior advisor on strategic affairs for the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. Next time, he said, the business community "would expect a robust process of communication with all stakeholders before any final proposal was put to the voters."

Shannon Haber, a spokeswoman for Los Angeles Unified School District, said in a statement that the district "has made significant water quality infrastructure improvements as part of its bond-funded new school construction effort" but faces a structural budget deficit that "threatens our long-term financial viability."

Even without a dedicated funding source, county officials said they've made progress on capturing stormwater.

The county's flood control district runs 27 spreading grounds where stormwater, recycled and imported water seeps into underground aquifers, and close to 100,000 catch basins that feed into a 3,300-mile network of underground storm drains.

In an average year, 200,000 acre-feet of water — enough for about 1.6 million people — gets cleaned up and placed back in the water table throughout the county, said Gary Hildebrand, a deputy director with the county's Department of Public Works who manages flood control. In the San Gabriel Valley, where porous soil makes it easier to filter water into the aquifer, about 90% of the storm runoff gets captured.

The county and cities have completed some ambitious projects — such as a park in a flood-prone area of Sun Valley where storm drains route runoff into a filtration system underneath a soccer field. Across the street, county officials plan to turn a former gravel pit into a wetlands park that will feed water into the filtration system and then into the water table.

The wetlands project will cost an estimated \$52 million, split between the county and city.

Andy Lipkis, president of TreePeople, a nonprofit organization that works on clean water projects, including the one in Sun Valley, said finding money for each project without a regional funding source is difficult.

"The way we're having to go about it all now is like a bake sale every time," he said.

Has El Niño abandoned L.A.?

Source: LA Times 2/9/16

By this point in winter, Southern California was supposed to be dealing with rains and flooding, not brush fires and beach weather.

Yet temperatures have soared this week, breaking records in downtown Los Angeles and other locations across California, with even hotter conditions expected Tuesday. Forecasters warn of more hot winds as well as temperatures that could exceed 90 degrees downtown.

For all the talk of monster rains from El Niño, all but three days in the last month have been dry in the Los Angeles area.

Has El Niño abandoned L.A.?

It's too early to be certain. But some scientists say El Niño is operating differently than they expected — at least for Southern California.

In the fall, the consensus was that El Niño would give Southern California the best chance for above-average rains and much less of a chance in Northern California. But the opposite has turned out to be true.

Southern California is still well below average rainfall, with downtown L.A. reporting 52% of normal since Oct. 1. But deluge after deluge to the north has built back the snowpack — it's 105% of normal in the Sierra Nevada — and begun to refill drought-depleted reservoirs.

For Southern California, the strong El Niño "hasn't been a great predictor so far this winter," said Stanford University climate scientist Daniel Swain, and "hasn't been influencing the atmosphere in exactly the same way that we have seen."

A massive ridge of high pressure is keeping much of California dry and warm this week. In Southern California, that brought dry winds and temperatures that approached 90 degrees.

At Mt. Baldy, the heat prompted officials [to close main trails](#) after unusually icy conditions resulted in two deaths and numerous helicopter rescues.

"The warm weather is melting the snow and it freezes at night," said Sherry Rollman, a spokeswoman for Angeles National Forest.

The conditions led to 12 people being airlifted off the mountain over the weekend.

A 47-year-old man died Saturday when he slipped and fell off the side of Icehouse Saddle near Mt. Baldy. Dong Xing Liu, who was known as Tony Liu, was the second person to die in the area last week. On Tuesday, Daniel Nguyen, 23, slipped and fell 1,500 feet after struggling to help a friend on the Devil's Backbone trail. The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department said it took nearly three hours in ice, snow and wind to retrieve his body.

Signs along the trails advise hikers to use equipment such as crampons and ice axes. It was not immediately clear what type of gear Liu, Nguyen and the rescued hikers were using, but officials said at least a handful were not wearing crampons — spiked metal plates affixed to boots to make it easier to walk on ice — and didn't have ice axes.

Mt. Baldy Fire Department Capt. Gordon Greene said a few people rescued Saturday afternoon were wearing shoe chains, which are less effective than crampons.

A series of big El Niño-influenced storms the first week of January left Mt. Baldy and other winter resorts with snow. But the promised "conveyor belt" of storms has not materialized since then.

El Niño is the warming of ocean waters about 1,000 to 2,000 miles south of California, along the equator.

That water heats up, fueling thunderstorms that push warm air into the atmosphere, which travels north. Eventually, it falls back down to the ocean in the subtropics, at roughly the same latitude Hawaii sits, Swain said.

It's that movement in the atmosphere — a circulation pattern called the "Hadley cell" — that supercharges a subtropical jet stream from Japan eastward into Southern California and into the southern United States.

But something changed this year. With the zone of warm water in the ocean particularly large and persistent, the movement of warm air above it traveled farther north than expected. That means the parade of storms zipping across the Pacific Ocean established a path over Northern California and even the Pacific Northwest — and bypassed Southern California, Swain said.

That may be the reason why all but one storm have missed L.A. over the last month. "It may be because El Niño is so strong," Swain said.

The difference in the path of the jet stream is "very slight in the global context," Swain said in an interview. "But if you're in Los Angeles, that difference means a lot."

Across L.A. on Monday, the heat wave brought longing for the promised rain that hasn't materialized.

Gloria Lopez, a Boyle Heights resident, held her 5-year-old daughter tightly by the hand as they walked along 1st Street. While Lopez, 48, was wearing sandals, her daughter was a little less prepared in a long-sleeved shirt.

"I don't know what's happening with this climate," Lopez said. "They said El Niño was coming, but nothing has happened. I don't know what's going to happen."

"*El calor no se quiere ir*," she said. "The heat doesn't want to go away."

Setrak Malatian, a Pasadena resident, was annoyed by the sun.

"Wintertime should be winter, not wintertime should be summer," he said.

Some remained optimistic about the possibility of rain down the line.

"When we get nice weather, then I'm happy for it," said Toni Fields, who was dressed in cutoff jeans, a tank top and sandals. "I just thank God we have nice weather, because I'm pretty sure it's still going to rain and that we're still going to get the mudslides."

Bill Patzert, a climatologist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada Flintridge, said one hypothesis is that El Niño needs to weaken before the storm track can reemerge over Southern California. In 1998, it was a weakening El Niño in January that preceded storms that pounded L.A. in February. Last month, El Niño was still extremely large and potent — about two and a half times the size of the continental United States.

In other words: "This is not too big to fail, but with regard to Southern California, it's too big to succeed," Patzert said.

"I'm still saying: Be patient. In terms of getting Southern California their El Niño fix, this thing has to shrink somewhat.... So if that idea is correct, then we're looking good for March and April."

For the period from Feb. 20 to March 4, the [National Weather Service](#)'s Climate Prediction Center forecasted a better-than-even chance of above-average rains for Southern California, given the strong El Niño condition in the ocean.

"Even though we haven't seen El Niño pan out" in sending storms to Southern California, said specialist Stuart Seto of the National Weather Service office in Oxnard, "that still doesn't mean we can't see good rains in the latter part of February and in March."

Water Recycling Project Subject of Lunch

The Valley Economic Alliance will present the “Woodland Hills Water Recycling Project” at the February 10 lunch of the West Valley Warner Center Chamber.

The Woodland Hills Water Recycling Project is an effort from LADWP, which has worked with Las Vigenes-Triumph Joint Powers Authority, to build a five mile pipeline to have major users in Woodland Hills tap into, including Woodland Hills Country Club, Louisville High School, Woodland Hills Community Church and more.

The lunch is sponsored by Premier America Credit Union and will be held at Maggiano’s at Westfield Promenade. Cost is \$25 for members and one-time guests. RSVP to 347-4737.

Water regulations

Source: Letter from Ventura County Star 2/8/16

How does the water authority expect us to save water if they do not enforce their regulations as to water hours.

I have neighbors that have no idea it means them. It is very frustrating when those if us that abide by the regulations have let our lawns go brown and flower beds empty.

Just look around at the car washing, green lawns and wet runoff on driveways in the area. I live at the point where all the water from runoff, car washing in the entire mobile home park exits. Sometimes it is white water flowing in days that we had no rain for some time.

What makes the authorities feel that I should abide by water hours when they allow the waste without doing anything about it.

Ed Pruger,
Oxnard

Development

Source: Letter from Ventura County Star 2/8/16

This morning I arose out of bed and looked out the window to view one of the most beautiful days in recent memory and thought how lucky I am to live here. I took my copy of The Star outside and started reading the headlines and what popped out were two that every resident of Ventura County and Southern California should be aware of.

“Camarillo development plans revived,” Shea builders is requesting 270 to 300 homes to be built on (you are going to love this) “land use change from natural open space and agriculture to residential and quasi public.”

The other item, “Ojai plan to be eyed,” would add 40 new affordable housing units.

We must be living in an alternative universe because with two days of rain our drought is over. Think of how many toilet flushings, lawn waterings, showers and teeth brushing among these new residents there will be, but I guess it is OK because our elected officials tell us everything is great.

Next summer could be the one where we will be restricted to one shower a week. We must write and email these people to tell them we live in a desert and the more people using the strained infrastructure is simply insane!

Dr. Ray Kirschbaum,
Westlake Village

Under the leaking roofs of Los Angeles Unified schools

Source: LA Times 2/8/16

Gym roofs leaked. Water dripped onto an auditorium stage. Storm drains clogged.

[Los Angeles Unified](#) schools made 176 rain-related service requests on Jan. 31 and Feb. 1, after the latest [El Niño rains soaked](#) Southern California. By Friday, the district's backlog had grown to 1,167 unresolved rain-related issues.

Most of these service calls stem from cracked, old roofs that let in the rain, so one solution is to replace them. The Board of Education is scheduled to vote Tuesday on whether to [approve spending \\$4.1 million](#) of bond money to replace the roofs at five schools.

Every time El Niño dumps rain on the city, dozens of L.A. Unified schools feel the impact of old architecture and outdated roofs.

Although employees are working overtime and the district is outsourcing some projects to contractors, the nation's second-largest school district can address only 40 to 50 of these service calls a day, said Roger Finstad, the district's director of maintenance and operations.

After a few weeks pass and the next storm hits, the leaks repeat. There simply aren't enough resources to fix them all on time, Finstad said. It is possible that some problems were reported more than once and have been resolved, but haven't been removed from the log, he said.

With more than 13,000 buildings in L.A. Unified, most classrooms are not leaking. Still, each time it rains, hundreds of students might be learning while listening to the background noise of dripping water.

Last week, it wasn't just the rain. [Winds worsened](#) the situation, and throughout the week, schools continued to call in complaints. There were more than 80 rain-related requests from Tuesday through Friday for issues including further leaks and a shingle that blew off the roof of Coldwater Canyon Elementary.

Why are some L.A. schools so prone to leakage? Many date back to the early 1900s, with roofs that have been replaced more recently but are still decades old.

Take Le Conte Middle School in Hollywood. The [Renaissance Revival-style campus](#) was built in the 1920s and is one of the district's beauties. The roof is 20 to 25 years old, according to district spokeswoman Elvia Cano.

On Wednesday morning, district roofer Rick Rodriguez smeared tar around a cap sheet that he had put on top of a crack about two yards long that was letting water fall onto the auditorium floor inside.

“This repair will last an easy five years,” Rodriguez said.

Supervisors decide which problems to fix based, in part, on the safety and health impact to students and the need to vacate an area because of a leak, Finstad said. Puddles forming on the playground, for example, might fall to the bottom of the priority list.

Staff also are working overtime during the rainy season to minimize damage. A maintenance employee preempted floor damage at Le Conte Middle School by putting a bucket under the leak on Jan. 31. Plant managers and maintenance staff visited school sites that Sunday to make sure their campuses were safe and to report any damage.

Because it’s difficult to address all the leaks, the district tries to preempt as much damage as it can.

Since 2012, the district has approved or begun construction on 48 roofing projects worth \$26.5 million. In the fall of 2015, [Finstad expedited 10 roofing projects](#) worth \$6.1 million when he found out that El Niño would be hitting Los Angeles hard this year. He was still dealing with a series of scorching classroom days, with hundreds of teachers complaining that the [air conditioning wasn’t working](#).

Other roof-replacement projects require a longer approval process, but even the expedited projects won’t be done until April or May because of the review and contract bidding process, Finstad said. El Niño will be mostly over by then.

“If I could start work at just my own schedule and whim, everything would be done right now,” Finstad said.

But he can’t, so those 10 are still in progress, and he hopes he’ll get funding Tuesday for the next round of projects.

Winter heat wave sets new records in California as some ask where El Niño went

Source: LA Times 2/8/16

Southern California was supposed to be dealing with rain, floods and mudslides from El Niño at this time of year.

Instead, the region is dealing with heat and even the occasional brush fire. Fullerton on Sunday was the hottest place in America -- at 89 degrees, and Ventura firefighters battled a brush fire that for a time threatened homes.

The heat wave set a new record for the day at Los Angeles International Airport on Monday (88 degrees) and tied a record in downtown San Francisco (74). Oakland Airport, Santa Barbara Airport and Monterey also hit record highs for the day on Monday.

So what's going on?

While forecasters still say El Niño storms are likely, Southern California has been kept dry by masses of [high pressure](#) sitting southwest of California, and on top of Southern California and Nevada. This type of system repels storms.

Northern California has seen plenty of snow and rain this winter.

Instead of El Niño rains, Southern California is dealing with strong winds and unseasonably warm temperatures.

The water content in the snow in the northern Sierra Nevada on Friday was pegged at 124% of average. For the central Sierra, it was 115% of average and for the southern Sierra, 93%. For the three regions combined, it was 111%.

State officials say the snowpack water content needs to be at 150% of average to come close to digging California out of the drought. That's an ambitious benchmark that will be difficult to achieve, and it's more likely that California will be about average for the year, officials say.

But this week, the north is also recording hot, dry conditions.

In fact, the latest forecast shows mostly dry, hot conditions for much of the state for the next week or more -- with little rain in store.

What is the forecast?

Hot Santa Ana wind conditions will continue through Wednesday, with the strongest winds expected to hit Los Angeles and Ventura counties Monday.

Temperatures will climb into the high 80s Monday and Tuesday on the coasts and in the valleys as humidity drops. Valley temperatures could top 90.

What is the fire danger?

Strong winds could top 70 mph for parts of Los Angeles and Ventura counties Monday, increasing the risk of potentially volatile fire conditions.

Firefighters were put on alert as powerful offshore winds, unseasonably warm temperatures and dry conditions prompted a red flag warning due to extreme fire danger in both counties. The conditions could lead to "rapid fire growth and extreme fire behavior," the National Weather Service warned.

In Camarillo, firefighters saw the dangerous fire conditions firsthand Sunday when [a small blaze](#) quickly expanded to three acres and threatened structures in the area. Firefighters were able to control the blaze after a fast and aggressive response.

How strong are the winds?

Gusts of up to 70 mph or higher were expected to howl through the mountains Monday. Similarly, powerful gusts reaching 50 mph could sweep through the valleys and coastal areas.

Warm Springs, a camp nestled in Acton, was hit with the strongest winds as gusts reached 58 mph overnight, the weather service reported.

Do people miss the rain?

It depends.

Raul Magana, a Norwalk resident, had checked his roof and the perimeter of his home, in anticipation of heavy rain. But on Monday morning, as he prepared to do some shopping, he wasn't dressed for rain weather -- he was in jeans and a short sleeve shirt.

"I thought it was going to rain ... It's not coming," he said.

"What happened to El Niño," he said, chuckling. "It looks like it's getting hotter."

"It's like summer," the 52-year-old laughed. "I don't think it's going to rain that much like they said. They said it was going to be the worst El Niño we ever had, but I don't think so. Unless it comes in like summertime."

In Boyle Heights, residents hustled on their errands, many dressed in shorts and sandals, underneath a sun beating down in a cloudless sky. Palm trees rustled slightly in the breeze providing only a little relief from the high temperature that had people chugging down water and enjoying ice cream.

Gloria Lopez, a Boyle Heights resident, held her 5-year-old daughter tightly by the hand as they walked along the street. While Lopez, 48, was dressed in sandals, her daughter was a little less prepared in a long-sleeved shirt.

Her daughter's teacher, Lopez said, had told her to come a little more prepared for the weather next time. In a bag, Lopez carried the sweater her daughter had worn that morning.

"I don't know what's happening with this climate," Lopez said. "They said El Niño was coming, but nothing has happened. I don't know what's going to happen."

"The heat doesn't want to go away," she said in Spanish.

Setrak Malatian, a Pasadena resident, likened the weather to the stock market -- up and down, with no one ever knowing what's going on. "We need the rain, but not El Niño," Malatian said. "We need badly, badly the rain. We didn't get enough rain."

Malatian said weather like this isn't good.

"Winter time should be winter, not winter time should be summer," he said. "Winter time, rain. Sunny day, spring or summer."