

## Eye on environment: Conserving water helps environment in numerous ways

By Arne Anselm Eye on the Environment

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Last week, Gov. Jerry Brown officially declared a drought state of emergency. California's rivers and reservoirs are below their record lows, and the statewide snowpack's water content is about 20 percent of normal for this time of year.

Through the declaration, the governor directed state officials to take action, and everybody should now do their part to conserve water.

Drought or not, for those of us living in arid Ventura County, water conservation needs to be a way of life.

The impact of wasted water goes much further than losing a vital resource. Water is delivered to parts of Ventura County through the State Water Project, and moving water across the state and over mountains requires a lot of energy.

Some of the water is used to replenish our groundwater supply to protect us if a catastrophe strikes the state's aqueduct. Conserving water both saves energy and helps Ventura County to be less reliant on Northern California.

But there's another benefit to conserving water that's even closer to home. More than 50 percent of household water is used outdoors. When this water is wasted, it runs down the gutter to a storm drain, then likely passes through a creek along the way to the ocean. Even in the nicest neighborhoods of Ventura County, we know the gutter is not a clean place. So any water running into the gutter will eventually be polluting the environment.

Allowing clean water down the gutter won't help a thirsty environment. The bacteria used to measure our beach water quality can live and grow in the gutter. Water going down the gutter will pick up the bacteria and carry them to the ocean. Currently, there is no way to keep all the bacteria out of the water when it rains, but we can, and should, when it's not raining.

Unfortunately, unless it just fell from the sky, water is not clean when it reaches the gutter. Overwatering your lawn can move pesticides, dirt and fertilizers. Compared to pesticides, fertilizer and dirt don't seem so bad, but they do create problems in the environment.

Bacteria and chemicals, including heavy metals, adhere to dirt. Dirt, even if free of

heavy metals, also harms habitat by settling to the bottom of a stream bed and filling in the nooks and crannies aquatic creatures need for habitat. Fertilizers help your garden grow, but if not applied correctly, or if water is allowed to run off, fertilizers will grow stream-choking algae with drastic consequences on fish.

To conserve water, prevent pollution and keep an eye on the environment, follow these tips:

During this drought, you shouldn't wash your car. If you must, take it to a carwash that recycles its water, or use a bucket and wash it on the lawn. The soap won't harm grass as it does fish.

Always use a broom to clean up, never a hose. Sweep and put the debris in a trash can. Using a hose to clean a driveway pollutes the environment and is prohibited by every city in Ventura County and the county.

Use climate-appropriate landscaping. Pull up the grass and plant a drought-tolerant, indigenous garden. As a bonus, this yard doesn't need to be mowed.

Put a self-closing nozzle on every hose and water only plants. There's no benefit to watering streets and sidewalks. Set irrigation timers and adjust sprinklers often to ensure nothing is wasted.

When it does rain again, turn off automatic sprinklers. Nothing looks more wasteful than running sprinklers in a downpour.

On the Net: <http://saveourh2o.org>; <http://www.epa.gov/watersense>;  
<http://www.cleanwatershed.org>

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