

We can Save More Than Water

By Arne Anselm, Water Quality Manager, Ventura County Watershed Protection District

This doesn't feel like February. Usually, February is the wettest month in Ventura County, averaging over 3 inches of rain in both the east and west sides of the county. But this February, we have received less than a barely measurable 0.1 inches, and there is no rain in sight for the rest of the month. In a dry year like this, we should all be thinking about conserving water, but the truth is, living in the arid southwest, water conservation should be a way of life. We need to do more than just think about it.

The impact of wasted water goes much farther than losing a vital resource. Water is delivered to parts of Ventura County through the State Water Project. Some of those deliveries are used to replenish our groundwater supply. This water is banked to improve local storage and protect us if a catastrophe strikes the state's aqueduct. Moving water across the state and over mountains also uses a lot of energy. Saving water saves energy and keeps Ventura less reliant on Northern California.

Another benefit of conserving water is closer to home. Seventy percent of residential water is used outdoors for things like watering the yard or washing cars. When this water is wasted, it runs down the gutter to storm drains, and then eventually into the ocean, most likely passing through a local creek along the way. Even in the nice neighborhoods of Ventura County, the gutter is not a clean place, and water running off your lawn into the gutter can still pollute.

Unless it just fell from the sky, water is rarely clean when it reaches the gutter. Overwatering your lawn can move pesticides, dirt and nutrients from fertilizers. Nutrients and dirt may not appear to be as bad as pesticides, but they can create problems. Dirt in the gutter moves the bacteria and chemicals that adhere to it, including pesticides and heavy metals. Dirt also harms habitat by settling to the bottom of a stream bed and filling in the nooks and crannies that make nice homes for aquatic creatures. Nutrients may help your garden grow but can upset a stream's natural balance by growing too much stream-choking algae.

Even clean water gets contaminated in a gutter. The bacteria affecting our beach water quality can live and grow in the gutter. Any water going down the gutter will pick these up and send them to the ocean where we swim and surf.

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

Wash your car or any other large items on the lawn, or ensure drainage to landscaping. The plants will love the water, and soap won't harm plants as it does fish.

Reach for the broom to clean up, not the hose. Sweep and put the debris in a trash can. Using a hose to clean-up wastes water, pollutes the environment and is prohibited by the County and every local city.

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

Water only plants. There's no benefit to watering streets and sidewalks. So, keep an eye on irrigation timers, and adjust sprinklers so they hit on target.

And when it does rain again – turn off your automatic sprinklers. Nothing looks more wasteful than running sprinklers in a downpour.

On the net:

www.epa.gov/watersense

www.cleanwatershed.org

www.vcwatershed.net/fws/AutoMedia.htm

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