



Water woes worry Los Angeles councilman

By Kerry Cavanaugh, Staff Writer

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With water supplies getting tighter, one Los Angeles leader has said the city needs to consider blocking new residential development until L.A. adopts regulations to limit water use in new projects.

West San Fernando Valley Councilman Dennis Zine said he called for the mandatory water conservation in new development after Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's plea for voluntary water saving was largely ignored by Angelenos.

"It's a drastic step but we need to start discussing this," Zine said. "The more we build, the more water is consumed. The slower we are to act on it, the worse the consequences.

"How are we going to put some teeth in our water conservation?"

In a motion submitted last month, Zine asked city departments to consider a land-use policy that would require all new residential development to occupy a water-use "footprint" of 10percent less than the previous usage of the property.

The Department of Water and Power and the Department of Building and Safety said they are looking at Zine's proposal.

Under state law, developers of more than 500 units must prove there is enough water for future residents, and so far the DWP has never rejected a project based on water shortfalls.

If the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California - which sells water to the DWP and other utilities - were to ration or dramatically cut supplies, then the DWP would reconsider its ability to provide for new customers, DWP spokesman Joe Ramallo said.

"Over the last 20 years we have continued to meet water needs - despite a population increase of 1million people - through strong conservation measures," Ramallo said.

Still, Los Angeles' water supply is getting tighter. Under environmental agreements, the DWP cannot take as much water from the Eastern Sierra. And pumping water from Northern California has slowed in order to protect fragile fish.

Deputy Mayor Nancy Sutley questioned whether the city would need to stop new development, as Zine has suggested.

"We're just at the beginning of the winter," she said.

But Sutley did agree that L.A. needs a more comprehensive water-conservation plan, and she

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pointed to the city's "green building" program that is aimed at saving water through building codes, landscaping requirements and water reuse.

"There are more options than just saying you must use less water," Sutley said. "We spend a lot of money putting potable water on our lawns. In some cases, it makes as much sense to do your landscaping with recycled water than not using water at all."

Holly Schroeder of the Building Industry Association's Greater L.A. and Ventura Chapter said new developments generally include the most water-efficient toilets, washing machines and appliances that older homes do not have.

And many new projects now incorporate drought-tolerant landscaping.

"We also have to remember we have a housing shortage," Schroeder said. "Are there better strategies for water conservation other than holding building permits, especially when you've made all these strides in development?"

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