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City Water-Conservation Program Gets into Gear

The City of Perris is embarking on a public education and outreach effort aimed at helping residents reduce their water consumption and save significant money on their utility bills during California's deepening drought.

The program officially kicks off Oct. 4 at the start of the annual Southern California Fair with a display highlighting the benefits of drought-tolerant landscaping compared with traditional grass lawns. Volunteers working at the fair display in Harrison Hall also will hand out water-saving tips in English and Spanish. The Southern California fairgrounds are located at Ramona Expressway and Lake Perris Drive, about three miles east of Interstate 215.

The fair runs from Oct. 4-12. Perris officials are seeking volunteers to help staff the water-conservation demonstration at the upcoming Southern California Fair.

Following the initial startup, the City plans on convening a "water summit" later this year as part of a much-more intensive conservation effort to encourage residents to trade lawns for "hardscape" ground coverings, use waterless car-detailing kits, sweep driveways rather than wash them, install low-flush toilets and opt for drip-irrigation systems instead of sprinklers.

"This is an issue that is too important to ignore or put off," said Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough in announcing the kickoff to the campaign. "We live in a region with limited rainfall so we have got to maximize the water we have and not waste a single drop."



City water-consultant Maria Elena Kennedy discusses water-saving techniques with Assistant City Manager Ron Carr, Perris residents Swey Becerra, Gonzalo Cervantes, Alexandre Becerra, City Councilman Mark Yarbrough and resident Tracy Ramirez. The conversation took place in front of a water-conservation display at Harrison Hall on the grounds of the Southern California Fair.

While all Perris residents will ultimately save money if they reduce water consumption, the opening phase of the campaign targets the City's disadvantaged Downtown area. Water for the 2,300 residential and commercial customers living there is provided by the City of Perris Downtown Water System. The City has begun identifying potential sources of funds to assist Downtown Perris residents become water savers.

Yarbrough said he believes that many Downtown residents can save up to half on their water bills by implementing conservation methods. City Councilman Al Landers said many families in the Downtown area struggle to make ends meet every month so conservation will put more money in their wallets.

"Utilities are one of your biggest expenses as a homeowner," Landers said. "We are committed to a program that saves money while keeping Downtown homes and businesses looking beautiful. The vision our City has for its residents is immeasurable. I have no doubt at all that our water-conservation program will be a success."

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers echoed those sentiments.

"Saving water equals saving dollars," she said. "Perris continues to lead the way in providing information about matters of importance to our residents. With the state of California's drought, it is vital to provide the necessary information through education so people can take it upon themselves to reduce their water consumption."

City Councilman Julio Rodriguez said the importance of saving water means more than reducing monthly utility bills—it benefits the entire drought-stricken state.

"Our schools are teaching the children the importance of being water-wise and now our City Council is taking the lead to encourage their parents," he said. "It's not okay to waste water irresponsibly. We are showing the way and I hope we can instill water-saving tips that will last a lifetime."



Perris water consultant Maria Elena Kennedy talks water-saving tips with Downtown resident Martina Coronel.

Public outreach to Downtown residents also has begun. City consultant Maria Elena Kennedy has canvassed much of the neighborhood, talking to families and individuals in recent weeks. Her conclusion: ratepayers are ready to reduce water usage.

"They are very excited to participate in this program," Kennedy said.

Kennedy said the City's program will concentrate on contacting individuals, families and neighbors and explaining the need for them to become water savers. Many disadvantaged residents have no access to computers, iPads, smart phones, facebook, twitter or other social-media outlets and rely on person-to person communication.

Martina Coronel, a 31-year resident of Perris, knows first-hand the impact of using water to maintain a lawn and plants. She is disabled; her husband, Andres, is retired. They live on Eighth Street in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Keeping their lawn and plants watered has cost as much as \$300 monthly.

"It's very burdensome," she said. "We are willing to do whatever it takes to save money. We are very supportive of what the City of Perris is doing. We want to keep the environment green while saving water."

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch said saving water is one of the most important challenges facing Perris residents—and indeed all Californians—in the future.

"Water is a non-renewable resource," Busch said. "When it's gone, it's gone. That is why it is so important to conserve and preserve our water resources."

The City is partnering with Eastern Municipal Water District and the Home Depot on the water-saving demonstration at Harrison Hall.

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