

CalMessage: "Berkeley Intensifies Efforts on Drought Emergency," February 5, 2014

Dear Campus Community,

I know that we all share serious concerns about the current lack of rainfall this year and want to do our part to ensure everyone on our campus is helping to reduce our water consumption and conserving resources.

Even though Berkeley has been reducing water consumption for years, the campus research on the severity of the drought overwhelmingly sends a clear call to action.

As early as 2011 – before the current drought – our campus set a goal to reduce potable water use to 10 percent below 2008 levels by 2020. Through efforts to date, we are already past the halfway mark toward that goal, and campus use is down a total of 17 percent since 1990, even given the growth in campus facilities in that same timeframe.

However, given the severity of the current situation, we must do more.

To address the short-term urgency of the problem I am asking everyone to use less water in your daily routines. A coordinated public awareness campaign will launch soon with information about simple actions that can make a difference. We are already hearing many of these suggestions such as turning off the faucet when washing hands or reporting leaks (through the campus water conservation hotline, 643-0890). We will strive to turn reminders into commitments, and commitments into habits, so that we can all contribute to lessening the impact of this and future droughts.

Can these individual actions add up to enough savings? At least half of the water consumed on campus and in our homes is domestic (toilets, showers, etc.), so changes in our daily routine are an essential part of a response to a drought emergency. Shortening showers by 5 minutes can save 12 gallons or more, and turning off the faucet while washing your hands can save 1/2 gallon. **If everyone saved a gallon of water a day, weekly campus use could be reduced by 250,000.**

Looking to the future, I have asked the campus Office of Sustainability to work with campus departments to intensify efforts and identify additional water efficiency opportunities. This analysis will build on and enhance existing work (especially at Physical Plant-Campus Services) but will also look more broadly, focusing on equipment and procedures with the greatest potential for water reduction. The information that is gathered will be used to prepare our campus for the possibility of an extended drought and can also contribute to renewed efforts.

Current campus reduction projects (both completed and currently planned) include reducing the water used by toilets and condensate leak repairs. There have also been reductions due to fixture upgrades in renovations and new buildings, and the creation of new habits affecting water use. For example, almost 98% of irrigation systems are automated and connected to a weather station. In addition, water use in residence halls, adjusted for the number of residents, has declined by over 35 percent in the last 10 years.

As the work to identify new opportunities proceeds, we will continue to monitor drought assessments and the impact of any late season rains. Additional steps may be announced in coming months, especially if the campus water provider, East Bay Municipal Water District, enacts any water restrictions.

Sincerely,
Nicholas B. Dirks
Chancellor