

## **Building and Safety has its “Eye on the Environment”**

By David A. Hansen, CBO, CFM

Drought? What Drought! We hear and see the word “drought” almost daily whether it’s on the radio, checking the news on our electronic devices, watching TV or reading the newspaper. Clearly, we are in a drought; however, local reports show water use reduction across Ventura County is only a fraction mandated by Governor Jerry Brown.

In his State of Emergency address over a year ago, Governor Brown stated, “*I’ve declared this emergency and I’m calling all Californians to conserve water in every way possible.*” At that time, the water use reduction target was 20 percent. More recently, in April 2015, the Governor implemented “...mandatory water reduction in cities and towns across California to reduce water usage by 25 percent.”

So why are we in this predicament? Rain, or lack thereof is a major factor. January 2015 was one of the driest months in recorded history. California’s snow pack is at 5 percent of its normal average, the lowest in 75 years. In an average year we will receive adequate rain fall to charge our snow packs and fill our reservoirs. At this time our reservoirs are at 30 to 60 percent below their average capacity.

There are a number of ways that your local Building Department can help. Building codes that are enforced by your local jurisdiction provide for safe, strong, and resilient structures built to a minimum standard. They also ensure efficient and environmentally compliant structures. Listed below are a few ways that together, you and your building department can help save water and protect this natural resource.

- Replacing noncompliant plumbing fixtures. The recent passing and enactment of Senate Bill 407, also known as the *Padilla, Property Transfer: Plumbing Fixture Replacement* act, essentially says buildings constructed prior to January 1, 1994, when additions, alterations or improvements are made, must replace noncompliant plumbing fixtures with water conserving plumbing fixtures. This is a condition of completion, final approval and occupancy. These requirements are applicable to residential, multi-family and commercial construction.
- Repairing leaks. Leaking pipes, valves and fixtures can contribute to excess water usage. In many cases a building permit is not required for these items. These types of repairs or replacements may also include those necessary to comply with Senate Bill 407.
- Attend a local seminar or workshop on water conservation. These might include drought tolerant landscaping, installation of a Rainwater harvesting system or the installation of a Graywater system. Local building departments, civic groups and organizations hold regular outreach presentations.
- Replace existing landscaping with drought tolerant landscaping that does not require extensive irrigation.

The Ventura County Building and Safety Division will be hosting a series of “how to” workshops for home owners wanting to install a residential Graywater and/or Rainwater

Harvesting system. Graywater systems divert the water you would otherwise discard to the sewer from certain areas of your home to your landscape for reuse as irrigation. The most common of these is a Laundry Graywater Disposal System (LGDS).

Like a small rainwater collection system, an LGDS can be installed without a plumbing permit, if some basic commonsense rules are followed. The Ventura County Building and Safety Division has summarized the requirements into 12 simple, easy-to-follow rules, as part of a standard plan for safe and sanitary installation. We also have demonstration walls that show what an LGDS should look like when it is completed. The workshops will feature hands-on demonstrations of methods and materials needed for these simple systems.

To register for a workshop, e-mail [Marie.Becerra@Ventura.org](mailto:Marie.Becerra@Ventura.org) or call (805) 654-2795, from 7:15 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

You can keep your “eye on the environment” by consulting with your local building department for recommendations and requirements related to new installation, repair and replacement of buildings, structures or their components.

*On the net:*

<http://saveourwater.com>

[http://www.ventura.org/rma/build\\_safe/pdf/graywater-workshop.pdf](http://www.ventura.org/rma/build_safe/pdf/graywater-workshop.pdf)

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