



Eye on the Environment for 7-27-14

Dirty Cars - A Visible Sign Of Drought

By Nancy Broschart, Management Analyst, Ventura Water

For many Californians, driving a dirty car is unthinkable. Turning on the tap and not having water flow out is unthinkable too. As each dry and hot day passes, the latest California drought deepens and it's time to not only think, but act as our water sources dwindle.

In early July, the City of Ventura issued a challenge to all County residents to drive a dirty car for at least one month. Inspired by California's Save Our Water (www.saveourh2o.org) message of "a little dirt won't hurt" your car, driving a dirty car in July is a visible sign that Ventura is working together to save our water. The goals of this somewhat silly contest include: saving water by skipping car washes, raising awareness of water shortages, and having a little fun.

By the way, many car lovers are not aware that a commercial car wash is the best deal, environmentally speaking. The professionals typically use 45 gallons per car and the water is recycled. Washing your car at home can use three times more water, and the dirt and grime washed off your car causes pollution on our beaches and ocean.

Local Ventura County radio spots are promoting the "Don't Wash Your Car" challenge and contest details throughout July. Participants are encouraged to post pictures of their dirty cars on Ventura Water's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/venturawater) with a complete car detail to be awarded to the top three pictures earning the most "Likes" by July 30. Random surprise winners are also being awarded prizes out in Ventura County parking lots for being the most filthy, grimy, grubby car spotted that day. Drivers can increase their chances of winning by scrawling "Don't Wash Me" in the dirt. Two weeks into the challenge, pictures of dirty cars are being posted daily by the unwashed on the Facebook page. A few observations: black cars do really show dirt, some people will avoid washing their car for a very long time, kitty paw tracks in dirt across a car hood make interesting patterns, and there is a whole genre called "dirty car art." Who knew?

One thing we do know, driving dirty cars is only the start. Looking down the road through the windshield, it is clear that we collectively need to use less water. Different communities in Ventura County rely on a variety of water sources – imported, groundwater, and surface water from local rivers and lakes. What all these have in common is that those water supplies are shrinking or limited or stressed. The City of Ventura's drinking water comes from 100% local sources, which are replenished only by rain. The water level of the Ventura River, our primary water supply during the rainy season, is low and dropping. A number of groundwater wells that supply water to our eastside of town have required urgent maintenance, which is limiting our water supply operations. In April, the Fox Canyon



Groundwater Management Agency approved an emergency ordinance that restricts groundwater pumping and reduces the city's allocation by six percent.

Ventura's other water supply, Lake Casitas, is at less than 58% of capacity. In addition to providing more than one third of Ventura's water, Lake Casitas also provides backup water to a number of Ojai customers who rely on the lake water when their groundwater wells go dry. Without more rain, the lake level is expected to drop to 50% by this October or November.

Water managers across California are searching for ways to encourage everyone to use water efficiently and to prevent water waste. In fact, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted regulations on July 15 to be implemented across California to tackle water waste in particular, with heavy fines for those not heeding the call for conservation.

So, Ventura, have fun letting your car get dirty this July (but we recommend keeping your car windows clean). It's a safer way to keep your eye on the road and on the environment. For all the dirty contest details, visit www.venturawater.net.

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On the net: www.venturawater.net