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## Focus turns to outdoor water use

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SACRAMENTO – Move over low-flush toilet. Step aside trickling showerhead. Make room for the satellite-controlled sprinkler and the pressure broom.

California's water watchdogs have escalated their outdoor conservation campaigns, pledging millions of dollars for rebates and other incentives to persuade residents and businesses to be just as conscientious outside as they have been inside.

"The next big frontier is more focus on exterior water use," said Lester Snow, director of the state Department of Water Resources.

On average, half of the water in the San Diego region is used outdoors, according to the county water authority. Three of every four gallons are sprinkled on landscape during the warmer months.

"There is a huge chunk of savings even in our own back yards," said Vickie Driver, a resources specialist for the San Diego County Water Authority.

Southern California water agencies are aggressively taking the fight outside.

"We've wrung most of the water savings out of your house," said Lynn Lipinski, who promotes conservation for the Metropolitan Water District, the giant wholesaler in Southern California.

Statewide, specialists representing dozens of agencies, business interests and environmental groups have proposed far-reaching initiatives to reward water misers and punish wasters.

"The success inside the home has emboldened water agencies to realize just how much savings is available from outdoor conservation," said Frances Spivy-Weber of Redondo Beach, a member of the California Urban Water Conservation Council.

Recommendations sent to the governor include more use of pricing programs that would force those who use the most to pay higher bills. Other proposals include limits on large landscaped properties and the use of dual water meters that track and price use inside and out. They also advocate encouraging new technology via building codes and giving those who buy the new devices higher rebates.

Snow has yet to review the group's proposals, but said he will ask the governor this year for more money to target conservation.

On Thursday, Schwarzenegger proposed a sweeping series of new bond measures, some of which would raise money for conservation, recycling and desalination.

The Metropolitan Water District, which delivers most of the water to the San Diego County Water Authority and 17 other agencies in Southern California, expects to spend \$12 million on conservation this fiscal year. Recognizing the growing demand, Metropolitan also committed a separate \$5 million over five years to reduce water use.

"We're creating a conservation climate that has the potential for even greater water savings without having to make sacrifices," Metropolitan's chairman, Wes Bannister, has said.

The San Diego County Water Authority recently adopted a conservation guide that preaches saving. The region suffered harsh reductions in water supplies during a punishing 1987-92 drought – a consequence authority officials hope to avoid by promoting conservation now.

The county water authority will spend nearly \$1 million on new conservation, inside and out, this year. Its 23 customer agencies deliver water to about 3 million county residents.

Conservation savings for 2005 were estimated to be 3,848 acre-feet. An acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons, or enough to serve two average households for a year.

New landscape guidelines could save nearly 19,000 acre-feet a year by 2010, authority officials suggest. By 2030, as much as 30,700 acre-feet is expected to be conserved outside.

The idea of being stingy with landscaping is just beginning to sink in with residents and business owners, water officials say.

"There's a lot of interest, but because the technology is so new, they don't tend to leap into it," said Driver, with the county water authority. "A lot of people are afraid of a new unknown technology."

Metropolitan is working with developers to aid plumbing and irrigation projects under an umbrella program called California Friendly.

Promising tools include weather-smart automatic sprinklers connected to satellites that know when a lawn needs water. Metropolitan offers residents a \$65 rebate, and large commercial landowners \$500 for every acre of irrigated landscape, to install the high-tech devices.

Pressure brooms that use less water to wash driveways and sidewalks come with a \$100 rebate. And new cooling towers on buildings can be subsidized with a \$500 rebate.

"They're really motivating builders," said Greg Ray, vice president of landscape architecture for Pardee Homes.

One of Pardee's latest developments, Pacific Highlands Ranch in Del Mar, has utilized water-smart technology inside and out.

Ray suggested that the state and water agencies offer industry incentives to create, develop and manufacture conservation tools. Also, nurseries should be encouraged to fully stock drought-tolerant plants, which can be hard to find at times, he said.

In San Diego, desalination and recycled water – belittled as "toilet to tap" but now being promoted as "showers to flowers" – remain an integral part of the county water authority's reuse arsenal.

But the county water authority is taking direct aim at waste, hoping urban users can reduce use 10 percent by 2010.

Indoors, the county water authority continues to push financial incentives for high-efficiency washers. It touts a new toilet that has two flush modes, depending on the amount of water needed.

The innovative commodes are being installed in 95 homes in the Eastlake area of Chula Vista.

"It was a no-brainer," said Doug Brooks, vice president of Oakwood Development. "It gives our customers a superior product. It's good for the environment and they work pretty well."

Metropolitan is also working with developers to establish voluntary water conservation standards for materials builders use.

Environmental groups say conservation will avoid the need to build costly and potentially destructive dams as California's population continues to grow.

"What's the cost of not doing this?" asked Jonas Minton of the Planning and Conservation League. "It's far less expensive and far better for the environment than building a reservoir or ocean-water desalination plant."

Conservation offers another benefit that's often overlooked, Minton said.

"Delivery of water is the single largest user of electricity in the state," he said. "So, if we reduce the amount of water we need we are reducing our energy use."