

# Water savings urged for Dallas

## Additional conservation could postpone expensive new sources

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By EMILY RAMSHAW / The Dallas Morning News

Some water experts have urged Dallas to bolster conservation efforts that could delay by more than 15 years the city's need to find additional water supplies – and save millions of dollars in the process.

Cities such as El Paso and San Antonio have reduced water consumption by more than 30 percent through conservative measures, the experts say, and Dallas can and should follow suit.

"Dallas could go a long way to avoid major infrastructure projects," said Norman D. Johns, a water resource scientist with the National Wildlife Federation. "It's not an unachievable goal."

Bob Johnson, director of Dallas Water Utilities, said that while conservation is a necessary step to extend Dallas' water lifeline, finding new sources is the department's priority.

### Summer Water Limits

[Water conservation, pollution tips](#)

#### **City of Dallas water restrictions:**

- No watering between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. from June 1 through Sept. 30.
- Irrigation systems installed after Jan. 1, 2002, must be equipped with working rain-sensing devices and freeze sensors.
- After Jan. 1, 2005, all irrigation systems must be equipped with working rain-sensing devices and freeze sensors.
- It is an offense to water a lawn or landscape in a manner that wastes water or causes runoff.
- Do not cause water to fall on sidewalks, driveways or other areas that are not lawns or landscapes.
- It is a violation to operate an irrigation system with broken or missing sprinkler heads or one that is poorly maintained and leads to water waste.
- Do not water or irrigate lawns or landscapes during any form of precipitation.
- For more information, visit [www.savedallaswater.com](http://www.savedallaswater.com) or call 214-670-3155. To report violations, call 311.

He said even with a conservation rate of 15 percent, Dallas would only gain a few extra years without a new water supply.

"My job is to go get the water – to make sure we don't find ourselves in a water crisis," Mr. Johnson said.

And with a surging population that has traditionally had little motivation to conserve, City Council members say, it's hard to know how well any highly aggressive water-saving tactics would work.

"When you look at the amount of water we waste, it's a little frightening," council member Veletta Forsythe Lill said. "Still, 30 percent would be very ambitious."

But Dr. Johns said the city would be served by being forceful. He said a 20 percent conservation rate would extend existing water resources to 2047. A 30 percent rate could delay the need for additional water supplies until 2060.

And he says Dallas has room to save. Both San Antonio and El Paso have averaged 37 percent water-use reductions since they started their conservation programs, Dr. Johns said – a result of strict regulations, maintenance and measures that reward customers for saving water.

In both cities, incentives are provided to home and business owners who install low-flow toilets and washing machines. El Paso offers a cash incentive to customers or builders who replace evaporative water air conditioners with central air units. San Antonio gives rebates to manufacturers or other industrial properties that retrofit equipment that uses high volumes of water. It also has a program that sends plumbers free of charge to low-income households to repair water leaks.

In Dallas, the average home, restaurant or business used 250 gallons of water per day in 2001. That municipal water consumption was 75 percent higher than the U.S. average – 143 gallons – and surpasses Austin, El Paso, Houston and San Antonio.

"Dallas is standing alone," Dr. Johns said. "Even when we have similar rainfall, we have dissimilar water use."

Dr. Johns said Dallas' biggest water culprits are single-family residences in Far North Dallas – particularly those with thirsty summertime lawns. On average, these homes use nearly 12,700 gallons per month, he said.

In recent years, the city's water department has stepped up conservation efforts. Since 2001, when council members approved a water-saving ordinance, peak use on summer days has dropped by 5 percent. And consultants are expected to release Dallas' Conservation Strategic Plan in September, which will give the city additional guidance for effective techniques.

City officials have actively explored future water supplies. But they got off to a slow start with conservation, something many cities in the Southwest have been practicing for decades.

Council member Lois Finkelman said San Antonio and El Paso were forced to save water because of dire situations, but Dallas has enjoyed ample resources.

"As a result, we've been more lax in our approach to conservation," Ms. Finkelman said.

Karl Wood, director of New Mexico State University's Water Resources Research Institute, said Dallas has the potential for a high conservation rate. He said the city must start by tackling outdoor watering and then raise the price of wasting water.

"Is conservation impossible? No, you just raise the price," he said. "The money talks."

This year, Dallas' water rates jumped 11.3 percent, bringing the average customer's bill to \$39.05 per month. Next year, they'll rise 7.6 percent, Mr. Johnson said.

But Ms. Lill said it's going to take more than high prices to have a major impact on conservation rates.

"We're very fond of our green lawns and swimming pools," she said. "I think we should phase [conservation] in incrementally."

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