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## **Down to the last drip**

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The Daily Times

Published July 06, 2005

Kerr County hasn't seen a drop of rain for more than a month now. June — typically a rainy month for the area — came and went bringing with it only two rainy days and less than an inch of rain.

Dry conditions not only prompted Kerr County commissioners last week to implement burn bans in all four county precincts, but it also may prompt the city of Kerrville to tighten irrigation restrictions.

Kerrville's Director of Public Works Paul Knippel reported Tuesday that water consumption had reached 6 million gallons per day, which is greater than the 5.77 million gallon consumption level that if reached for seven consecutive days, triggers the city to implement stage one of its water management plan.

"We have to be using 70 percent of our safe operating capacity. When we reach that threshold we're in stage one," Knippel said, adding that stage one will limit watering to two hours in the morning and two hours at night.

The plan has five stages, each of which increases irrigation restrictions as water consumption increases toward 100 percent of the city's 8.25 million gallon production capacity. The management plan, Knippel said, is the city's primary water conservation method. It allows the city to meet daily consumption demands while still attempting to send some water to storage.

"We just want people to be more conscious of when they're using water," Knippel said. "Right now, during the day, anything we're pumping toward those (reserve) tanks gets sucked off into distribution."

Currently, the city has about 500 million gallons of useable water in its aquifer storage and recovery wells and another

3.4 million gallons in its ground and elevated water storage tanks. While Knippel said there is no chance that the city could run out of water anytime soon, now is the time to conserve water to ensure that it will be available to meet daily demands if the city ever experiences drought conditions.

That starts by limiting when residents can water their lawns year-around, especially during the dry summer months, when outdoor watering accounts for about 50 percent total city water use.

"We already have some restrictions in place that people may not be aware of," Knippel said. "They prohibit automatic irrigation and sprinklers during the day."

While "hand-held irrigation" always is allowed, any type of watering using sprinklers only is allowed between 6 p.m. and 10 a.m. Once the city enters stage one, automatic irrigation only will be allowed between 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. While the additional restrictions at each stage of the management plan are intended to curtail consumption, Knippel said the limitations are not always enough .

"What really helps is if we get rain," Knippel said. "So much of our peak demands are driven by irrigation needs. When we've been dry for as long as we have, people start worrying about the life of their lawns, and sometimes, it causes people to water more, which is exactly the opposite of what we want to happen."

Violators of the ordinance are subject to fines as much as \$2,000. However, Knippel said the utilities division realize that many people may be unaware of the ordinance, and first-time violators will receive a warning. Repeat violators will be ticketed, he said.

Aside from the required conservation methods, there are many voluntary methods that residents can do to help conserve water. The simplest conservation method is to use less water. This can be as simple as turning off faucets when you're shampooing your hair, when washing dishes by hand or brushing your teeth, he said.

There also are many things home-owners can do to make their houses water-friendly, including repairing any leaking

faucets, pipes and toilets.

Leaking faucets may seem like only a minor annoyance, but that dripping can spell quite a costly problem, according to the Texas Water Development Board. A faucet that leaks just one drop per second can waste over 2,000 gallons of water per year. Inefficient toilets and unnecessary flushing accounts for 200 gallons a day, and the average shower uses about 20 to 30 gallons of water.

There also are many inexpensive, water-saving fixtures such as low consumption toilets and efficient faucets and showerheads that can make many everyday appliance more water-friendly.

One Center-Point couple, Raul and Sandy Pena, give the term "water-friendly home" a new meaning. For them, water conservation is a lifestyle. They practice the common tips, but they've also taken their stewardship one step further. They've implemented a rain-water harvesting system to collect every drop of the 35 to 50 gallons of water they use every day in their home. Pena said it's inexpensive and convenient, requiring virtually no maintenance.

"If enough people do that, then we don't have to worry about how much water's in the aquifers or how much is in the river," she said. "It's a stewardship concept. We feel like we're doing what we can. We're making not only a personal contribution, but a community contribution."

If people prefer not to collect rainwater for drinking, Pena said they should at least consider collecting it for irrigation during months when the city limits irrigation.

For information about the city's water management plan, call the Utilities Division at 792-8319. For more water saving tips, visit the Texas Water Development Board at [www.twdb.state.tx.us](http://www.twdb.state.tx.us).

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