

# Editorial: Differential Drought

Some cities are better than others at demanding conservation

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What will it take for North Texans to take water conservation seriously?

Try this: water rationing.

That possibility is being discussed among water officials in the North Texas Municipal Water District. It wouldn't be a pretty picture. Collin County cities each would get a set amount of water and have to stretch those supplies, come what may.

As lake levels continue to fall, the local water picture has gone from shaky to serious to scary.

Part of the problem is the absence of regional thinking and regional action.

Some cities have gotten tough with water violators, slapping fines on hundreds of them. McKinney, for one, has nailed violators with more than 500 citations, which cost more than \$400 a pop. Plano has written more than 6,000. Is it any wonder that both cities have been able to lower consumption over last summer?

Then there's Frisco. Citations are not part of the enforcement picture there. Instead, workers immediately disconnect sprinkler systems that run in violation of restrictions – nearly 4,000 disconnections this summer.

That's impressive, but Frisco's water consumption was up for both July and August. Frisco can't argue that its mushrooming population would defeat any level of conservation effort. Tell that to McKinney, which can match Frisco newcomer for newcomer.

(For the record, McKinney's August consumption was 977,000 gallons this year, down from 983,000 gallons last year. Frisco's August usage was 1 billion gallons this year, up from 834,000 last year.)

Inconsistent efforts across the district are also reflected in curbs on outdoor watering. Most member cities have gone to once a week. In Richardson, it remains twice a week.

Yet, short of proclaiming an emergency and declaring rationing, the water district is powerless to compel cities to make the same sacrifices as others. Nor can the district penalize cities for pitiful efforts toward meeting conservations guidelines for the year.

In the absence of a hammer to bring down on member cities, the district's ability to survive the drought depends on voluntary, shared sacrifice. That spirit has been lacking in some corners of the far-flung district.

Residents of places where enforcement is forgiving might feel things are just peachy today. They'll be singing a different tune if the region hits the crisis stage ahead.

*DMN Suburban Editorial Board*