
City officials say state water usage goal too low for Plano

By Josh Hixson, Staff Writer
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Plano's daily water consumption per resident is 113 gallons per person per day higher than the state recommended goal, according to data recorded in 2006 by the North Texas Municipal Water District.

Plano's total gallons per person per day - referred to by officials as gallons per capita per day or gpcd - water usage was 253, as compared to the state recommended 140.

This means that even after all of NTMWD's reservoirs are filled, Plano and other cities will have to continue conserving water, according to Mike Rickman, executive assistant at NTMWD.

"(Gallons per capita per day) is a yardstick for cities to tell where they are in that period of time," Rickman said. "I think meeting the 140 gpcd is a big task. It is strictly a goal, but there could be an impact in the future to obtain reservoir permits."

Jim Foster, Plano's public works director, said meeting the state's target for water consumption is unreasonable and a "non-enforceable goal".

"We have gone on record with those down in Austin that it is not a workable number for us," Foster said. "It is totally unrealistic to get to that number. To go down to 140 would be phenomenal, it would take a miracle."

Rickman disagreed saying, "I don't think we should give up because (the city of Plano) doesn't think they could get there."

In 2006 only three of NTMWD's member cities used less than 140 gallons per capita per day: Farmersville, Mesquite and Princeton, according to NTMWD.

Plano ranked second behind Richardson's 275 gallons per person a day. Frisco was third at 250.

Gary Hartwell, Frisco's public works director, said officials from the member cities have expressed concern over reducing their water consumption.

"It is definitely a concern," Hartwell said. "I think the reason that the numbers are so high right now is the excessive use of sprinkler systems."

Foster called the state's gallon-per-person-per-day measurement "unfair" because it doesn't consider the influx of employees who work in Plano during the day, but live elsewhere.

"We have over 100,000 employees that come into Plano and consume water everyday," Foster said. "It is an item we will have to continue to talk to the law makers about to get some type of recognition for."

Commercial water usage accounted for 72 gallons per person per day from August 1, 2005 to July 31, 2006, and residential use accounted for 173, according to the city of Plano.

Jack May, managing director of water and waste water utilities for Garland, said many cities are upset by the way water consumption is calculated.

"A lot of people have heartburn over gallons per capita because of the way it is made up," May said. "It would be pretty tough to get to (140 gpcd) if you are over 200 gpcd. I don't know that you can get there without some unhappy customers."

May said Garland - which consume 163 gallons of water per person a day - would have no problem reducing their usage to less than 140.

Rickman said a better measurement of a cities water usage compared to its population would be to only monitor residential gpcd. He also said the state credits cities for water reuse.

Foster said once the drought contingency plan is no longer in effect, his staff will submit a water conservation plan to Plano's city council, which may include new landscaping ordinances, encouraging the use of self-adjusting evapotranspiration controllers for irrigation systems along with other incentive and rebate based programs.

"Water conservation is going to be with us from now on," Foster said.

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Water usage lingo

Total gpcd:

Total gpcd is the total amount of water diverted and/or pumped for potable use divided by total population, as defined by the task force.

Residential gpcd:

Single-family plus multifamily consumption divided by the total population.

Why do officials prefer residential gpcd?

It eliminates everything but household water usage.

Who set the goal?

The Water Conservation Implementation Task Force in November 2004. The group suggests that water districts and their member cities use 140 gpcd, and show a minimum annual reduction of one percent in total gpcd until they reach 140 or less.