



San Diego County Water Authority

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News Release

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April 28, 2011

Water Authority Poll Shows Public Likely to Continue Water-Efficient Practices *Residents Support Regional Supply Diversification Plan*

Over the past four years, urban water users in San Diego County have reduced their water use by 20 percent, according to the San Diego County Water Authority. Now, a new countywide poll commissioned by the Water Authority found most residents plan to continue their water-saving practices under a variety of conditions, including the end of mandatory water use restrictions.

The poll also found that four out of five residents support the Water Authority's plan to diversify the region's water sources to enhance supply reliability, but there is growing concern about water rate increases to support investments in water reliability projects.

The poll, which surveyed 821 adults in late March and early April, found 83 percent of all respondents said they would continue to comply with water use restrictions even if they were not mandatory. In addition, the survey found:

- Nearly one-third of respondents (31 percent) said their household water use had decreased over the past year. Of those, 87 percent believed their reductions in water use are permanent.

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- When asked what factors will or might lead to increased water use in the future, large majorities of respondents said they did not believe their water use would increase even if they got a better job or promotion (81 percent), if water agencies stopped asking people to conserve (75 percent), or if the economy rebounds (72 percent). The factors more likely to lead to increased water use were if their family grew (60 percent of respondents said their use would increase), if the weather warms up (52 percent), or if they moved into a larger home (50 percent).

“It’s encouraging that the poll shows a vast majority of people are prepared to practice efficient water use on an ongoing basis, whether or not we are in a drought,” said Michael T. Hogan, Water Authority Board Chair. “Wise water use needs to be the social norm so we can manage our precious water resources both now and for the long term as effectively as possible.”

The poll, conducted by Rea & Parker Research and presented to the Board of Directors today, also probed the public’s attitudes toward supply diversification efforts and water rates. It found that many respondents view water as a good value for the money in comparison with other utilities, but more than half (55 percent) thought the current cost of water is too expensive. Further, residents are divided about whether they support future water rate increases to support water reliability projects. Specifically the poll found:

- 80 percent of respondents agreed with the Water Authority’s strategy to improve water reliability through water supply diversification efforts.
- 61 percent of respondents said they were either concerned or very concerned about the prospect of rising water rates.
- Among households that pay their own water bill, 48 percent were not willing to pay more per month as an addition to their water bill to support diversification of the water supply – a significant shift from 2006, when a similar question found only 13 percent said they would not pay more to support diversification. However, 43 percent are still willing to pay more per month.

“We know the public is increasingly concerned about the cost of water,” said Hogan. “The Water Authority has moved aggressively to manage rates through mid-year operational budget cuts, workforce reductions and project deferrals. However, as the last two years of water supply shortages have shown, it’s more important than ever to invest in projects that help ensure our region has the water it needs to

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manage through the inevitable dry years ahead. It will be important for us as a region to make prudent, cost-effective choices about the best way to ensure reliability for future generations. ”

Other findings from the survey include:

- The economy and jobs were identified as the most important issues facing the region today by 30 percent of all survey respondents. Water supply and quality issues, identified by 18 percent in the 2009 survey as a top issue, dropped to 6 percent in 2011.
- Respondents felt the most important components of the Water Authority’s supply diversification strategy were seawater desalination (28 percent) and recycled water (25 percent).
- When asked to identify the most critical thing that could be done to ensure a safe and reliable water supply, voluntary or mandatory conservation were cited by 27 percent of respondents, followed by recycled water (15 percent) and desalinated seawater (13 percent).
- The confidence level in the long-term reliability of the region’s water supply increased to 77 percent, up from 65 percent in 2009.
- Acceptance of adding recycled water that had received advanced treatment to drinking water supplies continues to increase, with 67 percent of respondents supporting the process, up from 63 percent in 2009 and 28 percent in 2005.
- Nearly half of respondents (48 percent) thought water use restrictions should be made permanent regardless of water supply conditions, and 70 percent felt that tiered water rates were an appropriate tool to convince people to conserve water.
- More than 80 percent said local agriculture was very important to the region’s economy, and 87 percent felt that farmers and growers should continue to receive reduced prices for agricultural water in exchange for receiving greater water supply cutbacks during water shortages.

The full results of the poll are available at www.sdcwa.org/public-opinion-research.

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The San Diego County Water Authority is a public agency serving the San Diego region as a wholesale supplier of water from the Colorado River and Northern California. The Water Authority works through its 24 member agencies to provide a safe, reliable water supply to support the region’s \$186 billion economy and the quality of life of 3.2 million residents.