



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA DROUGHT FAQs

When would the City declare a Stage 3 Drought condition?

The City is currently experiencing its 4th year of a historic drought with record low rainfall. On May 20, 2014 the Santa Barbara City Council declared a Stage 2 Drought Condition. If drought conditions persist through the winter, the City will be prepared to declare a Stage 3 Drought condition in spring 2015.

What changes in a Stage 3 Drought?

A Stage 3 Drought condition is the highest level of drought response, and includes consideration of increased drought water rates as justified by increased costs of service, additional regulations for water use during drought, and potential re-activation of the desalination facility.

How much does desalination cost?

The capital costs to reactivate the plant capacity of 3,125 acre-feet per year¹ (AFY) are estimated to cost up to \$40 million. Annual operating costs are estimated to be about \$5 million at full production and about \$2.5 million in standby ready-state mode.

How will the desalination costs be financed?

The City plans to take out a loan to finance reactivation of the desalination plant. Proposed drought water rates assume a loan (or bond) with 6 percent interest and 10 year payback period, which results in annual payments of approximately \$5.3 million. This is a conservative estimate in order to ensure that revenues will cover the cost of the loan. The City continues to pursue State loans to reduce impacts to ratepayers. If State funding is secured with a lower interest rate, the proposed City water rates will be reassessed to reflect actual terms of the loan.

Will the proposed water rates take effect if desalination is not reactivated?

No, the proposed drought water rates are based on the need to reactivate the desalination facility, in preparation for continued drought conditions. Should the City receive sufficient rainfall to alleviate the drought condition and delay the need for desalination at this time, water rates will be reassessed prior to taking affect on July 1, 2015.

How much rain do we need to postpone the decision on desalination?

Average rainfall in the Santa Ynez River watershed providing runoff to Lake Cachuma is approximately 25 inches. To postpone the decision on desalination, above average rainfall would be needed. As a frame of reference, Gibraltar Reservoir, also located along the Santa Ynez River, would need to fill and spill in order to postpone the decision on desalination by another year. For the City's drought condition to be considered over, Cachuma Reservoir would need to fill and spill.

Why isn't the City currently requiring more than 20 percent demand reduction?

During periods of drought, the City's adopted 2011 Long-Term Water Supply Plan calls for planned immediate demand reductions of no more than 10-15 percent. Due to the current historic State-wide drought, the City has increased the requirement for immediate demand reduction to 20 percent. Given that the duration of the drought is unknown, the City aims to limit the level of extended water shortage to no more than 20 percent annually due to potential unknown impacts to community assets, such as trees and other established landscaping, and the health of the local economy.

While the City is aiming to limit the level of extended water shortage in its drought water supply planning, additional demand reductions beyond 20 percent may be necessary. These higher levels of required demand reductions are typically reserved for shorter duration emergency periods and may be necessary if the supply outlook worsens (e.g. planned supplies are not available), or if the community does not consistently meet the 20 percent demand reduction, requiring additional monthly savings to achieve the annual goal. The City currently has sufficient supplies for 2015 as long as the community continues to meet the requirement of 20 percent demand reduction.

What percentage of the City's water supply will the desalination plant provide?

Based on the City's 2011 Long-Term Water Supply Plan, the City would use the facility as a drought relief measure at a capacity of 3,125 AFY, which is approximately 20 percent of average annual demands under normal weather conditions.

¹ An acre-foot is equivalent to approximately one football field covered with one foot of water. There are 435.6 hundred cubic feet (HCF) in one acre-foot.

If the desalination plant is reactivated, extraordinary water conservation from residents and businesses will remain critical to meeting water demands.

When could we start receiving water supply from desalination?

While the core infrastructure has been maintained, the desalination facility has been inactive for 22 years. Since desalination technology has changed considerably over the past two decades, it is currently estimated that it will take a little over one year to reactivate the plant (for design and construction). If a contract to reactivate the plant is awarded in April 2015, water supply from the desalination plant is anticipated by summer of 2016.

Can the desalination plant be expanded?

Yes. The City's permits and the basic infrastructure of the facility allow for up to 10,000 AFY of water production capacity. The original plant constructed in 1991 had 7,500 AFY of treatment capacity. Current proposed water rates assume reactivation at a plant capacity of 3,125 AFY. An expanded plant capacity, up to 7,500 AFY, is currently estimated to cost an additional \$30 million and would require additional water rate increases.

Is the desalination plant a regional facility?

When the temporary desalination plant was constructed in 1991, Montecito Water District and Goleta Water District were partners in the project. In order to make the facility a permanent water supply, an extensive environmental review and permitting process was required. At that time, Goleta and Montecito declined to participate. The City of Santa Barbara completed the permitting process in the 1990s. The City is the sole owner of the plant and has continued to renew its permits over the years. If other agencies participate in the reactivation process, it could require additional permitting and possibly delay reactivation beyond City needs in the current drought.

What would be the alternative if the desalination plant is not reactivated?

Severe drought is a recurring issue for the Santa Barbara area. Knowing this, the City's 1994 Long-Term Water Supply Program included conversion of the temporary emergency facility to a permanent part of our water supply. This was accomplished in 1996 with approvals by the City's Planning Commission and the California Coastal Commission, as well as continuing inclusion of the desalination facility's brine discharge as a component of the City's El Estero Wastewater Treatment Plant discharge permit. Accordingly, the City expects that reactivation of the plant can be accomplished. If, for some reason, this does not occur and the drought continues, the City would make efforts to increase supplemental imported water purchases; however, the availability and price of water purchase opportunities is uncertain, and there are environmental and capacity constraints that could limit actual delivery of imported water. Further demand reductions would likely also be required, with potential significant impacts to the City's permanent landscape resources and the local economy.

Will the desalination plant be operated after the drought?

Over the years, treatment technology has significantly improved requiring less energy and allowing longer periods of inactivity without deterioration. Therefore, the City does not expect to put the reactivated facility back into long-term storage mode after the current drought. Instead, the plant would be minimally operated to keep it in a ready-state standby mode for future droughts or other supply emergencies.

What can I do to make sure I am doing my part to reduce my water usage?

The City can help you evaluate water usage both indoors and out with a free Water Checkup. Make sure you only water your garden when needed and use drip irrigation or high-efficiency nozzles. Use your water meter to check for leaks on a regular basis and make sure you have high-efficiency appliances and plumbing fixtures. For more information on conservation programs visit www.SantaBarbaraCA.gov/WaterWise or call (805) 564-5460.

THE CITY WILL BE HOSTING TWO PUBLIC MEETINGS TO DISCUSS DROUGHT ISSUES:

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2015 AT 6:00 PM AND THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2015 AT 6:00 PM

BOTH MEETINGS WILL BE HELD AT:

**CITY OF SANTA BARBARA COUNCIL CHAMBERS
735 ANACAPA STREET, SANTA BARBARA, CA 93101**

FOR MORE INFO ABOUT THE CITY'S WATER SUPPLY AND DESALINATION VISIT:

WWW.SANTABARBARACA.GOV/WATER