

# Memorandum

*Serious drought.  
Help save water!*

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

Date: May 20, 2015

File:

From: MALCOLM DOUGHERTY  
Director



Subject: CALTRANS CONTINUING DROUGHT EFFORTS

As California faces a fourth year of extraordinary drought conditions, with 2014 being the driest year in recorded state history, Caltrans is committed to conserving precious water resources and to using water wisely on the State Highway System (SHS). Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. proclaimed a second "state of emergency" in April 2015, and ordered all urban water users to reduce water consumption by 25 percent. I am pleased to report that in 2014, due to careful irrigation management, prudent maintenance and construction practices, strategic investment in new technology and training for our staff, Caltrans reduced its water consumption by 32 percent, exceeding Governor Brown's reduction order. In 2014, Caltrans used 5 billion gallons of water for roadside irrigation on over 30,000 acres of roadside - the largest water need for Caltrans. This is a reduction from 7.4 billion used in 2013, a decrease in 2.4 billion gallons. I would like to commend all employees who contributed to this extraordinary effort.

Caltrans implemented a comprehensive Drought Action Plan last year, for which all planned tasks were completed. This included evaluating potential water needs on all projects and delaying some planting work, investing in irrigation and facility plumbing modernization, eliminating irrigation in landscaped areas that were determined to be self-sustaining, eliminating irrigation of lawn areas, and confirming water availability from purveyors prior to beginning construction activities. Additionally, we achieved a significant accomplishment by updating Caltrans accounting system to allow for more accurate and timely water use reporting and identification of recycled water sources.

We performed excellently in 2014 to reduce water use, but due to the worsening drought conditions, we must do more this year and into the future, to ensure efficient water use in all our activities. We will continue to reduce water use in operating Caltrans' facilities, and when performing construction and maintenance on the SHS, to help ensure there is sufficient water for all Californians. Facing the worst drought in recorded California history, we must continue to act decisively to curtail excessive use of potable water and increase the use of recycled water.

Caltrans is working closely with local water providers to ensure the department complies with all local conservation plans, and adheres to any additional local actions or reduction requirements. We are investing in new connections to recycled water sources and are

converting irrigation facilities to use recycled water. We are also conducting a pilot study to determine the feasibility of recycling wastewater for use in rest area facilities. As we look towards additional methods for efficient water use for transportation needs, Caltrans must also protect the state's \$1.4 billion investment in highway planting. The plants along the roadway serve valuable functions such as reducing erosion, preventing graffiti, protecting water quality, serving as firebreaks and absorbing pollutants from the air.

As drought conditions in California continue through 2015, Caltrans is preparing to carry out further and more drastic ways to increase its water conservation efforts. This spring, Caltrans will release a new Drought Action Plan for 2015 to continue progress toward achieving a statewide reduction goal of 50% of 2013 water use with the following focus areas:

- Ensure our actions protect our investments and the functional benefits of roadside vegetation. We will not purposefully eliminate roadside vegetation for the sole reason of water conservation.
- Continue to repair and modernize our roadside irrigation infrastructure with a goal of 100% conversion to “smart” technology components, including training and improved field equipment for Maintenance.
- Increase the use of recycled water wherever possible using existing recycled water resources and cultivating new sources.
- Provide direction and training to all functional units.
- Delay the installation of most planned planting work sponsored by Caltrans or our partners until late fall of 2015, or a later date when the drought emergency abates, with full commitment to meet our environmental mitigation requirements as soon as prudent.
- Continue to invest in modernization of our building fixtures.
- Implement a District reporting process for regular updates on water consumption and share improved efforts for efficient water use.

Caltrans will continue to do its part to reduce water use as we transition to even more sustainable transportation practices and help fellow Californians to conserve and thrive during the drought by setting an example of good stewardship of our limited water resources. We are facing a difficult situation, but with prudent and practical actions, each of us can contribute to conserving water this year to meet our water reduction commitments.