

**Guest Column: California Water: The Crisis We Can't Ignore**

**Publication: Santa Clarita Signal**

**Date: 12/2/07**

**By William Pecsí, President of the Castaic Lake Water Agency Board of Directors**

It's pretty simple, isn't it? You turn the knob, and water comes out. Turn the knob on the right side of the faucet, and you get cold water. Turn the knob on the left, hot water. It works whether you're taking a shower, doing the dishes or just getting a cold drink.

Every time. Like clockwork. Turn the knob, get water. Never fails.

Simple?

Not really.

Will it always be that way?

Good question. Especially now. Especially in California.

We're fortunate here in the Santa Clarita Valley: We don't have to turn the knob only to discover ... nothing. But that doesn't mean it's a simple process to make sure your tap never runs dry. On the contrary, securing and delivering a reliable supply of quality water is a complex proposition fraught with its own unique environmental, political and technical challenges, even in the best of times.

Here at the Castaic Lake Water Agency, we have been planning ahead, securing water supplies that not only meet the "normal" demands of our customers (that's you), but also help us weather the storm - or, lack of one - when our region is hit with an extended dry spell, as it is enduring now.

Like the rest of California, we are concerned about our future water supply. But unlike many areas, we have a sufficient supply to ensure that we can absorb the dry spell - for now - without resorting to extreme measures like rationing.

However, the relative calm over the water situation here in the Santa Clarita Valley belies the bigger problem for our state as a whole, and it's important that all of us not only recognize the dire nature of the bigger picture, but also do our part to help improve it.

The Association of California Water Agencies is in the midst of a crucial public outreach campaign to increase awareness among all Californians about the statewide water crisis.

As the association puts it, this is a crisis we can't ignore.

"Despite intense media attention and focus by the governor and legislators, the public is largely unaware of the state's water problems," the water agency association says on its new public-awareness Web site, [www.calwatercrisis.org](http://www.calwatercrisis.org).

For the first time in California history, the statewide water supply and delivery system may not be able to meet the state's growing needs, warns the Association of California Water Agencies, of which Castaic Lake Water Agency is a member.

There are multiple factors in this crisis: an ongoing drought, climate change, aging infrastructure, continued population growth, and environmental issues such as the debate over how best to manage the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The delta has made many headlines statewide over the past few months, as a U.S. District Court judge has ordered a dramatic reduction in the amount of water being pumped from the delta while the federal government sorts out ways to protect an endangered fish, the delta smelt.

It's potentially the largest manmade water supply reduction in California history.

Yet the general public seems largely unaware of the urgent nature of the crisis.

The Association of California Water Agencies is seeking to change that, with a public outreach effort that includes not only the Web site [calwatercrisis.org](http://calwatercrisis.org), but also a series of print and broadcast public-service announcements that bring the crisis home to Californians.

If you were to ask yourself, "What can I do about it?" the odds are the first thing that would come to mind would be conservation.

That's a good place to start, and you can find some valuable conservation tips at [clwa.org](http://clwa.org).

From a local perspective, anything we can do to conserve this precious resource not only helps improve the "big picture" of water supply and demand, but also improves our ability on a local level to continue delivering water reliably for a lengthier period of time, even as the crisis continues.

Unfortunately, however, just reducing our usage isn't enough. As the water agency association says, "We cannot conserve our way out of this crisis."

While conservation is of paramount importance, it alone will not solve the problems facing our water supply.

How will the delta smelt affect the ability of the State Water Project and Central Valley Project to pump delta water for delivery to millions of Californians? And, beyond that, what are the best ways in general to manage the delta's water and environmental resources?

How will climate change and future droughts impact our supplies?

How will our state plan for future water delivery and storage, as delta levees and other infrastructure continue to age, becoming more vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes?

These issues and more are the focus of a rather intense debate in Sacramento as the governor and state lawmakers wrangle over the details of various proposals that are likely to result in one or more ballot initiatives in which voters will be asked to approve construction of new water infrastructure.

The problem, it turns out, is much more complicated than what could be addressed by a few years of good rainfall. All of the crisis' various factors create challenges when it comes to supply, storage and delivery, and their impacts are magnified when viewed cumulatively.

It's important, then, for every Californian - including those of us in the Santa Clarita Valley - to not only use water more efficiently at every available opportunity, but also to become increasingly aware of the crisis, its ramifications and its potential solutions. (To stay informed, you can get on ACWA's mailing list at [calwatercrisis.org](http://calwatercrisis.org).)

After all, you don't want to be surprised one day to go to your kitchen faucet and turn the knob only to find ... nothing.

The ACWA campaign puts it bluntly, but accurately: We can't take water for granted.