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## Local Commentary · Conservation

# Saving water and saving some green on the green belts

**T**here are many things that attract us all to the Santa Clarita Valley as a place to call home — great schools, a low crime rate and excellent dining and recreational opportunities.

Not the least among the attributes that draw us to this community is its appearance. The SCV is surrounded by hills and open space, and within its developed areas are well-designed and attractive parks, and landscaped public spaces that help make residents happy to call this place home.

Those landscaped public spaces, though, don't just happen by themselves.

They may have been created by a developer. Or perhaps they are the result of beautification efforts by the city of Santa Clarita or Los Angeles County.

They took time, effort and energy to create, and they take time, effort, energy — and water — to maintain.

Make that a *lot* of water.

California's ongoing water crisis has heightened public awareness of the importance of using water wisely, and here at Castaic Lake Water Agency we take seriously our responsibility for promoting a new ethic of efficiency in the use of this precious resource, not only during times of drought but all the time.

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**Dirk Marks**

SCV Voices

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Managing our water smartly is much more than a short-term effort to get through a difficult time — it needs to be a continuously applied philosophy, recognizing the value of the resource and its finite availability.

We've talked about many of these efforts in the past, including resident-oriented tips on landscaping and irrigation efficiency. And now, we are proud to say we will be working hand-in-hand with large landscape customers and their water purveyors to help increase water use efficiency for green belts, parks, common areas and other large landscaped spaces throughout our community.

Starting this month, CLWA, along with the other members of the valley's family of water suppliers, is embarking on a large landscape audit and incentive program we believe is an important step toward improving the valley's overall water use efficiency.

This program is geared toward large landscape customers with two or more acres of irrigated landscape in the public and private sectors, such as homeowners associations, large businesses and city and county parks. These large landscape users, which could benefit from this program, can review it at [www.clwa.org](http://www.clwa.org) or contact their local water retailer.

In a nutshell, the plan is for Santa Clarita Valley water professionals to work directly with large landscape customers to assess their current irrigation situations, identify opportunities to improve efficiency and offer incentives and rebates to help the customers upgrade and modernize their equipment to increase efficiency.

The program begins with a water audit to identify potential water savings and the associated reductions in water bills. The program also provides training for customers and their landscape contractors, a commercial-grade, weather-based irrigation controller (WBIC), high-efficiency sprinkler nozzles and minor repairs to existing equipment.

The high-tech WBICs improve efficiency by sensing weather condi-

tions — including not only precipitation but also temperature and the amount and duration of sunlight — and adjusting watering schedules automatically.

In addition, the program will help large landscape customers identify areas where turf substitutes can be used. In some of the valley's more nicely landscaped developments, there are grass greenbelts that made for great marketing tools as developments were built and sold to homebuyers, but don't necessarily constitute "usable" turf space.

These areas present an opportunity to use less-thirsty turf substitutes that will improve water-use efficiency without diminishing the lush appearance of the landscaping.

With higher future energy costs expected, we can anticipate future water costs to also increase. This program will allow owners of large landscapes to make some strategic investments that will not only save water but also save money.

CLWA plans to invest \$192,500 in the large landscape audit and incentive program in its first year, and over the first decade of the program, it is expected 280 landscape audits will be performed.

We already have indications the program will work here. CLWA, its Santa Clarita Water Division and the Valencia Water Co. have done some pilot work with large landscapers and the response has been

very favorable. For example, in a four-month pilot project, one local condominium complex saved more than a million gallons of water, which is about 10 percent of that complex's use over the same period of time last year.

These savings were achieved by switching the complex's irrigation controllers to WBICs, installing efficient irrigation nozzles and making some repairs and changes to irrigation systems, including the elimination of some blockages when irrigating as well as the relocation of some irrigation equipment to make it more efficient.

Such savings not only make water use more efficient, but also help keep large landscape customers' water costs down. This in turn can benefit all residents, as local government agencies and homeowners associations save money on water.

The program is only as good as the training it provides and the willingness of landscape professionals to put the training to use, and we are glad to see the irrigation audits and training are being well-received.

It is this spirit of cooperation that will help landscape professionals improve their water use efficiency, thus saving money, conserving valuable resources and continuing to maintain our community as an aesthetically pleasing place to live.

CLWA is seeking motivated large landscape customers to sign up for the program. If you are aware of a large landscape user that could benefit from this program, please have them review the program at our Web site or contact their local water retailer.

If you are looking for more information on water-use efficiency it is available at [www.clwa.org](http://www.clwa.org).

*Dirk Marks is the water resources manager of the Castaic Lake Water Agency. His column reflects the agency's views and not necessarily those of The Signal.*

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