

Do you want the good news first, or the bad?

If you wanted to, you could wear out the "bad-news-good-news" cliché while discussing water in the Santa Clarita Valley.

For example, the bad news is a major earthquake could temporarily shut down the State Water Project by destroying levees in the area of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta — a shutdown that could seriously get our attention, since approximately 40 percent of the water we are using comes from the SWP.

Locally, the good news is we have enough local groundwater and other sources of stored water to serve the Castaic Lake Water Agency's customers for over two years in the event of a State Water Project shutdown. So we could continue to deliver water to Santa Clarita Valley homes and businesses even if disaster strikes the Delta.

There's more bad news in terms of the big picture, though. If nothing is done before Delta Doomsday occurs (a two-in-three chance over the next 25 years), the impacts will be severe — ranging from the obvious, like a worsening statewide water supply crisis, to secondary, trickle-down economic effects that could cause billions of dollars in financial damage.

Bad news: quake. Good news: stored water. Bad news: California on the whole is at risk.
And so on.
So it's no surprise, then, that we have both good news and bad news to report about Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's June 4 declaration of a statewide drought and his June 12 proclamation of an emergency in the southern Central Valley.



Dan Mashada

A statewide drought is, of course, bad news. And, the governor is not exaggerating in making his declaration. We've had two consecutive dry years, in combination with recent court rulings restricting pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, that are reducing California's surface storage (in other words, water that is stored in lakes and reservoirs). Supplies in some areas are stretched so thin that farm land is being fallowed this year.

The drought declaration is more than just a statement of the obvious. It's an official acknowledgment that drastic means may be needed throughout the state to cope with the water shortage.

Simply put, it's the initiation of a chain of events that could lead to rationing in many California communities if the drought persists.
The good news locally, though, is we currently have adequate supplies, so your tap shouldn't be running dry anytime soon, even in the worst-case scenario.

Water Conservation: Tips to Help Manage a Valuable Resource

With California facing ongoing drought conditions, the Castaic Lake Water Agency is asking Santa Clarita Valley residents to help manage water resources as efficiently as possible. CWA is providing a variety of simple conservation practices, including the following:

- **Swing Up.** Use a broom instead of a hose to clean up outside.
- **Control the Flow.** Use an adjustable hose nozzle for outdoor uses. Five minutes of a running hose can use as much water as a 20-minute shower.
- **Fix Your Fixtures.** Loose-fitting shower heads and faucets can serve water purposes.
- **Take a Shorter Shower.** A family of four could save 600 gallons a month by cutting shower time to 5 minutes.
- **Reverse Your Air Right Now.** Most air conditioning units are designed to cool and dehumidify the air inside your home, not the outside. Reverse the air flow to cool the outside air and reduce the humidity in your home.
- **Wash Smart.** Wash clothes in full loads.
- **Wash Your Car.** Wash your car in a car wash or use a bucket and sponge.
- **Wash Your Dishes.** Wash your dishes in a sink full of water.
- **Wash Your Hands.** Wash your hands in a sink full of water.
- **Wash Your Face.** Wash your face in a sink full of water.
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Yet while we can afford to have a certain degree of peace of mind, we also have an obligation to be responsible in how we manage and use our water. Although our local situation is less dire than it is in many other areas of our drought-stricken state, we have a responsibility as Californians to use our available water supply wisely while bearing in mind the overall context of the statewide water crisis.

We may not be rationing, but we must do all we can to not waste an increasingly valuable resource. We have a safe, reliable supply of water, but we must plan to absorb and minimize the impacts of the statewide worst-case scenario.

For now, our optimism is guarded. We believe we have been taking — and continue to take — the right steps to minimize the local impact of the drought and any possible statewide crisis. We have stored water and have secured water from non-State Water Project sources, such as the Kern River, that are immune to the challenges that exist in the Delta.

It remains important to have a healthy awareness of the situation on a broader scale, and we are asking your help as we initiate efforts to conserve and use water wisely.

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Conservation alone won't solve the problem, nor will it increase our stored reserves of water — but it will help us preserve the water we have in storage, better enabling us to save it for when we really need it.

If you have not already started doing so, we are asking all customers to implement some common-sense, simple water-conservation practices.

There are a variety of specific actions you can take, starting now, that will help the Santa Clarita Valley to most efficiently use water, painlessly weather the drought and to minimize the impact of other external factors (i.e., the recent court rulings) on our water supply portfolio.

Where to begin?

Well, outside, for one thing. Since 70 percent of residential water use occurs outdoors, your use of water outside your home is a prime target for

conservation.

For example, do you water your lawn every day? If so, it's highly likely you are not only using more water than necessary but also over watering your lawn.

Watering on alternating days usually gives your lawn the satisfying drink of water it needs — even during the hot summer months.

Other variables such as time of day can have a profound effect on your water use for irrigation, too. Irrigating in the early-morning hours offers the most efficient use of your water.

Also, have you checked your irrigation system to make sure the water is going where it's intended to go, rather than flowing off your landscape and into the street?

Like any system that's used with regularity, irrigation hardware experiences wear and tear over time, so you should inspect it periodically and replace worn-out sprinkler heads, repair leaks, and otherwise maintain it.

Also, if you're considering new landscaping, you have a great opportunity to choose attractive vegetation that is

drought tolerant. If you visit the CLWA's landscape garden at our headquarters adjacent to Central Park, you will find many examples of less thirsty plants that thrive in our valley.

Other conservation opportunities abound. What about clean-up jobs? Rather than hosing down your driveway, try sweeping. If you wash your own vehicle, turn the water off while you're soaping and scrubbing, then run the water only when you need it to rinse.

Inside the home are a variety of things you can do to save water — without any inconvenience, without drinking less water and without resorting to any of the extreme clichés floating around out there (By now we've all heard the same jokes about refraining from bathing.)

More realistically, you can install lower-flow fixtures to reduce water used by showers, toilets and faucets. In fact, you may even want to contact your local water retailer to find out if you qualify for a rebate to replace old, inefficient toilets.

If you have a leaking faucet, it's not only a source of irritation — drip, drip, drip — but also a water waster. After all, those drips add up.

If you're looking for more ways to be "water wise," our Web site, www.clwa.org, offers a variety of tips and information, including a link to a "watering calculator" that can tell you how long you really need to water your landscaping (You may be surprised by the calculations.)

Hopefully, these efforts will eventually prove to be solely preventative. If our state is indeed able to create the right multifaceted solution to guarantee Californians a safe, reliable supply of water regardless of variables such as weather, earthquakes and long-term climate change, we'll be able to throw out the old cliché and start a new one: "I've got some good news, and I've got some more good news. ..."

Dan Masnada is general manager of the Castaic Lake Water Agency. His column reflects the agency's views, not necessarily those of The Signal.