

# Groundwater Update



FALL 2003

A PUBLICATION OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT AND THE SOUTHERN NEVADA WATER AUTHORITY

## State Engineer, committee study overpumping

In June 2003, State Engineer Hugh Ricci met with the Advisory Committee for Groundwater Management to discuss recently approved legislation that addresses overpumping by well users. He asked the committee to help develop recommendations on ways to reduce overpumpage.

Nearly half of all permitted well users are overpumping to some extent. It is estimated that well users are using nearly 3,000 acre-feet more groundwater than their permits allow.

The legislation (Assembly Bill 213) authorizes the study of overpumping and compliance with permit terms, and was supported by the State Engineer, the Nevada Well Owners Association and the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

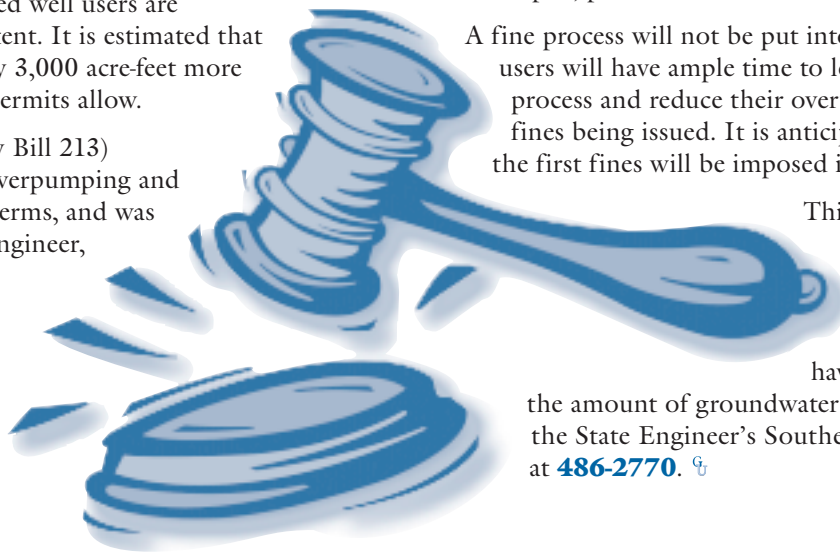
While the State Engineer and the advisory committee hope

that well users voluntarily choose not to overpump, a process for fining well users who consistently overpump will most likely be presented to the Legislature in 2005. If you would like to be notified concerning upcoming committee meetings at which a potential fine process will be developed, please call **258-7288**.

A fine process will not be put into place overnight. Well users will have ample time to learn about the fine process and reduce their overuse well in advance of any fines being issued. It is anticipated that, if necessary, the first fines will be imposed in 2006.

This edition of *Groundwater Update* contains a letter from State Engineer Hugh Ricci concerning overpumping. If you have questions concerning

the amount of groundwater you use, please contact the State Engineer's Southern Nevada branch office at **486-2770**. ☎



## Legislature approves new groundwater law

The Nevada Legislature recently approved a new law that removes the sunset clause on the State Engineer's mandatory connection policy. It also authorizes the State Engineer to recommend to the 2005 Legislature what additional measures are needed to ensure that well users are not using more groundwater than they are legally allowed.

Assembly Bill 213—sponsored by Assemblyman Harry Mortenson on behalf of the Nevada Well Owners Association—was unanimously approved by the Assembly and Senate. Governor Kenny Guinn signed the legislation May 19.

More information on the State Engineer's connection policy is contained in this edition of *Groundwater Update*. ☎

# State Engineer's mandatory connection policy explained

In 1999, the Nevada Legislature passed several bills to assist well users who are required by the State Engineer to connect to a municipal water system. The State Engineer's connection policy is the subject of much debate and confusion. To clarify specific points, several commonly asked questions are answered below:

## What is the State Engineer's mandatory connection policy?

By law, the State Engineer can mandate a connection to a municipal water system in the Las Vegas Valley only if:

- The well serving the property fails (meaning a drill rig is needed to deepen or replace the well) **and**,
- Any property served by the well is within 180 feet of an existing water line.

## Who is affected by this policy?

The policy only affects community well users with temporary permits and domestic well users whose wells have failed. Well users with permanent water rights are not affected by this policy.

## How do I find out if I have a permanent water right?

If your groundwater permit has a priority date on or before March 24, 1955, it is a permanent water right. If the priority date is after March 24, 1955, it is probably a temporary permit. You can get more information concerning your permit by calling **486-2770**.

## Does the State Engineer's connection policy expire?

No. The passage of Assembly Bill 213, which was introduced on behalf of the

Nevada Well Owners Association this year, codified into law the State Engineer's existing connection policy.

## Why does the State Engineer have a mandatory connection policy?

In 1955, the Nevada Legislature authorized the State Engineer to issue temporary permits in the Las Vegas Basin to allow the valley to continue to grow—all available groundwater had been allocated prior to 1955.

Temporary permits were issued with the understanding that when a municipal water source became available, the permit would be revoked and the property would be connected.

## Is there a financial assistance program to help well users connect?

The Groundwater Management Program operates a well conversion grant program to provide financial assistance to well users who volunteer or are required to connect to a municipal water system. The grant

pays up to 85 percent of connection costs to the municipal water system. For information about the grant program, please call **822-3317**.



## Well conversion update

Since the inception of the Well Conversion Grant Program in 1999, the State Engineer has only mandated the closure of five wells while more than 185 well users have volunteered to connect their wells to a municipal water system during this same period.

## Groundwater Update

*Groundwater Update* is published by the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA). Comments or questions should be directed to:

SNWA Public Information  
1001 S. Valley View Blvd.  
Las Vegas, NV 89153  
You may also call **258-3930** or log on to **snwa.com**.

The SNWA was established in 1991 to address water issues on a regional, rather than local basis, and to provide a reliable water supply that meets or surpasses state and federal drinking water standards. The SNWA is committed to managing the region's most precious resource and developing solutions to ensure water quality and adequate future water supplies for Southern Nevada. In addition, the SNWA educates customers to use water more efficiently, promoting conservation to help ensure the long-term viability of our region's water supply. With the help of an active citizen's advisory committee, the SNWA has established an ambitious annual water conservation goal of 25 percent by year 2010.

The SNWA is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of one representative from each of the seven SNWA member agencies: the cities of Boulder City, Henderson, Las Vegas and North Las Vegas; the Big Bend Water District; Clark County Water Reclamation District and Las Vegas Valley Water District.

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## Tips to reduce outdoor water use

**W**ell users need to stay within the limits of their permits. The following sprinkler watering tips will help well users reduce the amount of water used outdoors:

- ➔ It takes 79 gallons annually to sustain each square foot of grass. By contrast, it only takes 17 gallons annually to sustain each square foot of water-smart landscape.
- ➔ You do not need to water your lawn everyday in the cooler months of the year. In spring and fall, water your lawn 3 times a week. In the winter, water your lawn once a week.
- ➔ Water your lawn 3 times a day, 4 minutes each watering. Schedule start times at least one hour apart. Use the cycle-and-soak method of watering. Adding or removing 1 minute from the watering time will change the amount of water you use by 25 percent.



- ➔ Monitor how many minutes you can run your sprinkler system before water starts to run off the property. Stop the run cycle at that point. Allow the water to be fully absorbed before beginning the next cycle.
- ➔ Water your lawn on a separate schedule from your plants, trees and shrubs, which should be on a drip system.
- ➔ Test, adjust and repair your sprinkler heads and drip emitters weekly in the summer and monthly in the winter. Always check your sprinkler system for malfunctions after mowing.
- ➔ Water before sunrise from May to October to minimize water lost to evaporation. Water during mid-morning from November to April to prevent icing on driveways and walkways.

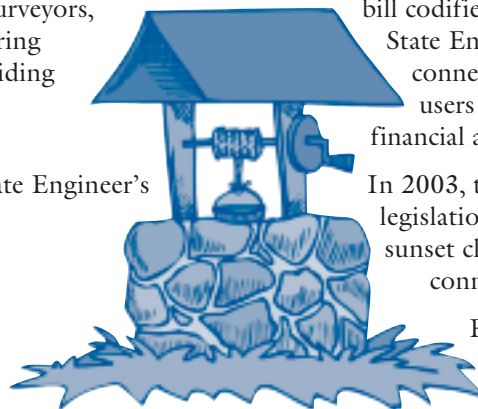
For more water-smart tips, visit [snwa.com](http://snwa.com).

## What does the State Engineer's Office do?

**T**he mission of the Nevada Division of Water Resources (also known as the State Engineer's Office) is to conserve, protect, manage and enhance the State's water resources for Nevada's citizens through the appropriation and reallocation of the public waters.

In addition, those working for the division are responsible for quantifying existing water rights, monitoring water use, distributing water in accordance with court decrees, reviewing water availability for new subdivisions and condominiums, reviewing the construction and operation of dams, appropriating geothermal water, licensing and regulating well drillers and water rights surveyors, reviewing flood control projects, monitoring water resource data and records and providing technical assistance to the public and governmental agencies.

For more information concerning the State Engineer's Office, please call **486-2770**.



## What is the Nevada Well Owners Association?

**I**n 1999, a group of well users organized the Nevada Well Owners Association (NWOA) in response to concerns about groundwater issues in Southern Nevada. The NWOA sponsored Assembly Bill 408 (AB 408), which in its earliest form would have prohibited the State Engineer from revoking a temporary permit unless there was "just cause." AB 408 was amended several times throughout the 1999 legislative session.

In the end, the NWOA, Southern Nevada Water Authority and the State Engineer's Office agreed on a compromise bill that was eventually signed by the governor. The compromise bill codified into law for a period of six years the State Engineer's existing policy for mandatory connections. AB 408 also mandated that well users who were required to connect be offered financial assistance.

In 2003, the NWOA successfully sponsored legislation (Assembly Bill 213) to remove the sunset clause on the State Engineer's mandatory connection policy.

For more information about the NWOA, please call **395-8506**.

# How much groundwater can I use?

The State Engineer determines how much groundwater can be pumped for all permitted wells.

By permit, most community well users are allowed to use 1,000 gallons per day. The State Engineer reads the meters of all permitted wells twice a year. Permitted well users who are currently overpumping will soon receive a letter notifying them of their overpumpage.

Domestic well users (a well serving a single home) are allowed to use 1,800 gallons per day. Although not generally required to be metered, the State Engineer has the discretion to require a domestic well user to meter his or her well if the engineer believes the domestic well is pumping more than 1,800 gallons per day. [G](#)



## Billing reminder

The 2003 annual groundwater fee bills were due on Oct. 12. If you have not yet remitted payment, please do so immediately.

Please look inside for an important message from the State Engineer.

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Southern Nevada Water Authority  
1001 S. Valley View Boulevard, MS #760  
Las Vegas, NV 89153  
[www.LasVegasGMP.org](http://www.LasVegasGMP.org)

**GROUNDWATER UPDATE**





DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF WATER RESOURCES  
SOUTHERN NEVADA BRANCH OFFICE

400 Shadow Lane, Room 201  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89106

October 15, 2003

RE: Allocations of groundwater use from quasi-municipal (community) and domestic wells

Dear Well User:

The Nevada Legislature has directed the office of the State Engineer to study the issue of overpumping by well users and make recommendations to the 2005 Legislature to increase compliance. A substantial number of well users in the Las Vegas Basin are using more groundwater than they are allocated. In some instances, this overuse may be due to not knowing the limitations on their groundwater use.

There are different types of water rights and classification of wells within the Las Vegas hydrographic basin. In general the typical homeowner on a well is either being supplied by a quasi-municipal well with a revocable permit (commonly referred to as a community well) or by a domestic well. Both types of wells have limitations on the amount of groundwater that can be withdrawn.

**Quasi-municipal well (commonly referred to as a community well)**

A permitted quasi-municipal well serves two or more homes. All quasi-municipal wells must be metered and, in most cases, each home being served by a quasi-municipal well is limited to 365,000 gallons of water per year (which equates to an average of 1,000 gallons per day) regardless of home or lot size.

**Domestic well**

A domestic well is a well that serves one home for culinary and other household purposes, including a family garden, lawn or domestic animals. Domestic wells are exempt from the water rights process as long as the pumpage does not exceed 1800 gallons of water per day.

As noted both the quasi-municipal wells and domestic wells have limitations on the amount of groundwater that can be withdrawn on a daily basis. Therefore, it is important for well owners to stay within their allocation. **I want to emphasize that well owners are not having their allocations reduced; they are being directed to use only the amount of ground water within their allocation.** A letter will be sent at a later date to notify those permitted well users that are overpumping.

This edition of the *Groundwater Update* provides supplemental information on the issue of over pumping. The goal of the Division of Water Resources is to conserve, protect and manage Nevada's valuable water resources in a fair and equitable manner. If you have any questions concerning this letter, please call the Southern Nevada Branch Office at 702- 486-2770.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hugh Ricci, P.E." followed by a flourish.  
Hugh Ricci, P.E.  
State Engineer