

Groundwater Update



SPRING 2004

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

Well users respond to conservation programs

Due to an overwhelming response from the well-user community, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) Board of Directors increased funding for well-user landscape conversions to \$150,000 annually on Jan. 15. The board acted on a recommendation from the Advisory Committee for Groundwater Management, which suggested the funding increase late last year.

Because of continued demand for the Water Smart Landscapes program, the new funds have already been committed. To meet well owners' growing interest, the Water Authority is seeking more funding to continue the rebate program. Those interested in the program can still apply, but their application will be placed on a list until the additional funding is secured.

To ensure as many well users as possible can access the funding, the board also limited the total annual reimbursement for each well-user landscape conversion to \$2,500 for each property served by a well. This will cover

well-user conversions up to 2,500 square feet. By comparison, the average residential turf conversion for municipal water customers is 1,600 square feet.

The Water Smart Landscapes program provides a \$1 per-square-foot rebate to property owners who replace turf with water-efficient landscaping. Well users first became eligible for the program in July 2002. Since then, well users have submitted applications for the removal of more than 170,000 square feet of turf.



A pre-conversion site review is required before removing water-guzzling turf.



Visit snwa.com for more information about water-smart landscaping and design ideas.

Depending on the lushness of plant variety selected, the SNWA estimates that about 55 gallons are saved each year for every square foot of grass replaced with water-smart plants. On average, homeowners typically apply 73 gallons per square foot per year to their lawns. By contrast, on average homeowners only apply 17 gallons per square foot per year to water-smart landscaping. By upgrading 2,500 square feet of grass to water-smart landscaping, a well user can save on average 138,000 gallons per year.

Under the new funding, at least 60 well users will be able to take advantage of the conversion program each year. The program operates on a first-come, first-serve basis. An application and site inspection are required before work can commence on turf removal. Please call **(702) 258-SAVE** for information.

Landscape conversions for well users are funded through the annual groundwater-management fee, which is paid by all well users in the Las Vegas Valley. The fee also pays for the permanent recharge program, well-conversion grants, the plugging of unused wells and educational materials.

Public workshop attracts well users

More than 200 well users attended the Groundwater Management Program's annual public workshop on Dec. 8, 2003. Most well users who attended were concerned about overpumping.

At the workshop, representatives of the State Engineer's Office answered questions and responded to comments from well users in attendance. Excerpts from the discussion include:

How many gallons of water are in an acre-foot?

An acre-foot is equal to 325,851 gallons of water.

Who determines the amount of water that constitutes overpumping?

Except for domestic wells, a permit issued by the State Engineer is required for all groundwater use. The permit specifies the amount of water that can be used. Any water used in excess of the permit amount is considered overpumped.

Do domestic wells have meters?

A meter is not required for domestic wells; however, pumping of the well is limited to 1,800 gallons per day. If the State Engineer believes a domestic well is exceeding its limit, the State Engineer can require the well be metered.

Does the Water District own the water rights to all the groundwater?

The Las Vegas Valley Water District has approximately 40,000 acre-feet of permanent groundwater rights; the City of North Las Vegas has more

than 5,500 acre-feet. An additional 24,000 acre-feet of water rights are privately held.

Are the big users overpumping their wells?

Very few large users are overpumping their permits.

Does everyone on a community well get 1,000 gallons a day?

In nearly every case, each home on a community well is allotted 1,000 gallons per day (365,000 gallons per year).

If I was connected to city water I could pay to use extra water, but if I am on a well I cannot pay to use extra water because I will be taken to court and fined.

The current process only allows the State Engineer to take an overpumping well user to court. There is no process to fine overpumping. A fine process could allow the State Engineer to regulate groundwater use without the involvement of the courts.

See Public Workshop on page 3



All permitted wells are required to be metered.

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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 **(702) 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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Are homeowners not on a well limited to 1,000 gallons a day?

Municipal water customers are not limited in the amount of water they use, but are discouraged from wasting water through a tiered water-rate structure, where customers pay increasingly higher rates as more water is used.

What is the average daily water usage of a household on a municipal system?

The average daily use for a single-family residence on the Las Vegas Valley Water District system was 581 gallons per day in 2002.

Where do we get the dates of the meter readings and a baseline number to determine if we are overpumping?

The State Engineer's Office reads metered wells two times each year and issues a comprehensive pumpage inventory each spring.

State studies overpumping

In 2003, the Nevada Legislature directed the State Engineer to study the office's administrative powers to ensure well-user compliance with permit terms. The study will also determine if additional authorities, including possible monetary penalties, are needed. The Advisory Committee for Groundwater Management has been providing input to the State Engineer on possible compliance approaches. The committee prefers education as the primary tool for encouraging compliance, but recognizes some process is likely needed to ensure compliance is maintained.

If a compliance process is developed, it will likely be implemented in 2006—at the earliest.

Advisory committee seeking members

The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) is soliciting nominations to its nine-member Advisory Committee for Groundwater Management. The committee includes seven well users representing groundwater interests throughout the valley, as well as non-voting representatives of the State Engineer's Office and the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection. Each voting committee member serves a two-year term and attends quarterly meetings to discuss groundwater issues and develop recommendations to the SNWA Board of Directors.

At this time, the SNWA is seeking nominations for:

- Two domestic well representatives
- One quasi-municipal (or community) well representative
- One commercial/industrial well representative

If you are interested in serving on the advisory committee, please send a letter of interest to:

Southern Nevada Water Authority
Attn: Management Services (#760)
1001 S. Valley View Blvd.
Las Vegas, NV 89153

In your letter of interest, please indicate your name, address, phone number, the type of well you have as well as any specific qualifications you have that would benefit the advisory committee. Current committee members are also eligible for reappointment.

Your letter must be postmarked by Aug. 20, 2004 to be considered. The SNWA Board will make its appointments before the end of the year. To learn more about the advisory committee and its activities, please call the Groundwater Information Line at **(702) 258-7288**.



Advisory Committee members recently received Groundwater Guardian designation from the National Groundwater Foundation.

Voluntary well conversions continue

The well-conversion grant program has proven popular among well users in the Las Vegas Valley. Since its inception four years ago, the program has provided financial assistance to more than 200 former well users who voluntarily applied for conversion to municipal water.

Voluntary well conversion customers receive a grant that covers:

- 85 percent of the off-site construction costs for the first 180 linear feet of pipeline
- \$500 for on-site construction costs
- Free well plugging and abandonment

If you would like further information about the well conversion grant program, please call (702) 822-3317.



Well users are eligible for the well conversion grant program.

Abandoned wells need plugging

Improperly abandoned wells are significant potential sources of contamination to the valley's groundwater aquifer. As wells age, the chance of a casing failure increases, potentially allowing contamination of the drinking-water aquifer by shallow, lower-quality water.

Any abandoned or improperly plugged well is a potential conduit for contamination. Unused wells with rocks or boards covering the top are not considered adequately 'plugged'.

The Las Vegas Valley Groundwater Management Program has partnered with the Nevada Division of Water Resources to offer a program that will properly plug and abandon unused domestic or community wells at no cost to qualified well owners. If you have any questions about this program, please call (702) 822-3317.

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