

California is hunting for people who waste water, even stars like Oprah

By Bloomberg News, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.24.15

Word Count **582**



Tony Corcoran surveys water coming out of a drain in Beverly Hills, California, June 5, 2015. Corcoran is one of several people who spend their spare time these days canvassing the posh communities of Beverly Hills, West Hollywood and elsewhere, looking for people wasting water during the worst California drought in recent memory. Photo: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — Paul Brown sets out before sunrise to patrol Sacramento. He is looking for evidence that someone is wasting California's water. It may be a wet sidewalk or a damp driveway.

Every so often he catches someone breaking the law. For example, he's caught people using sprinklers to spray their lawns on a no-watering day.

Brown works so early in the morning that he does not usually meet anyone when he is writing warnings or tickets to offenders. Sometimes early risers can make his job more difficult. He works for the city making sure California's citizens don't use too much water. Two weeks ago a woman was rude to him after he issued her a \$50 fine. Homeowner Robin Sortman, watching Brown take photos of his wet pavement, asked why the city gets to decide which two days a week he can water.

"I'm not sure I understand the problem," Sortman said, showing off his empty swimming pool. "I'm not able to enjoy my summer this year. I shower twice a week. We don't use the toilet as much. We use our water very minimally."

Governor Tells Everyone To Save Water

California's current drought is the worst the state has seen in a long time. It has been going on for four years and seems like it will never end. It's really starting to get on people's nerves. California issued rules last month for cutbacks that Governor Jerry Brown ordered in April. This is the first time all the state's 39 million inhabitants have been forced to conserve water.

Some are better at it than others. This is why there are water cops such as Brown. There are also hotlines and websites in cities for homeowners to snitch on those being wasteful. City officials say California residents have been more than happy to snitch on their neighbors.

"We're in a really deep hole," said Peter Gleick. He works for a group which studies water in Oakland, California. "There's this feeling on the part of some, 'Why are you asking me to do more when my neighbor has done nothing?'"

Water is being restricted in different ways. For example, people can use outdoor taps only at certain times. People are also being forced to pay money if they use too much water.

Twitter Has "#DroughtShame"

Some Californians are drought-shaming people who waste water. There is even a hashtag on Twitter: "#DroughtShame" and an app called DroughtShame.

People post photos of Californians wasting water. Lots of famous people have been caught. Oprah Winfrey, Sean Penn and Kim Kardashian and her husband, Kanye West, have been listed because their lawns are very green.

The app's inventor fears for California's future. "You watch the news at night and you see pictures of the lakes that have dried up," said Estes, who created the app. "The next morning, you're walking the dog and you see water all over the sidewalk." The two just don't make sense, he says.

California has faced drought many times before. In the 1800s a drought killed many cattle. In the 1930s another drought caused fights between different townspeople. They all wanted more water than was allowed.

In 2015, the same things are happening. In Madera County, near Fresno, some people are stealing water from their neighbors. Water has become very valuable. The city of Sacramento recently set up a water-crime task force to check when and where people are stealing water. Some people are even taking it from fire hydrants.

Quiz

- 1 Which of these sentences would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
 - (A) Brown works so early in the morning that he does not usually meet anyone when he is writing warnings or tickets to offenders.
 - (B) California's current drought is the worst the state has seen in a long time.
 - (C) He works for a group which studies water in Oakland, California.
 - (D) In the 1800s a drought killed many cattle.

- 2 What is the main idea of the section "Governor Tells Everyone To Save Water"?
 - (A) For the first time, water use is restricted for all Californians.
 - (B) Water cops, like Brown, have a very difficult job.
 - (C) People are forced to pay money if they use too much water.
 - (D) The new rules about water use are very unpopular.

- 3 Why does Robin Sortman show off his empty swimming pool?
 - (A) because he is proud of owning a swimming pool
 - (B) because the authorities forced him to drain it
 - (C) because it proves that he is doing his part to save water
 - (D) because empty swimming pools are very fashionable

- 4 The app DroughtShame works by:
 - (A) supporting new laws
 - (B) embarrassing people who waste water
 - (C) creating new technology for saving water
 - (D) forcing people to pay for using too much water

Answer Key

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