

## **SACBEE.COM - April 3, 2015**

### **Water restrictions hit golf courses, cemeteries, homebuilders**

By Dale Kasler

Cemeteries and golf courses are struggling to limit the brown patches and keep their trees alive. Landscapers and nurseries are trying to educate customers about drought-tolerant alternatives to vast stretches of lawn. Homebuilders are dealing with rules requiring drip lines around new construction.

All over California, businesses big and small are reacting to the ongoing drought, and to the statewide water-use reductions ordered this week by Gov. Jerry Brown. The governor's order follows emergency water-use restrictions imposed on businesses in March by the state Water Resources Control Board.

Many business owners say they've already taken significant steps to reduce their water use. Brown's order contains few specific directives to business; it merely says they have to cut water use by 25 percent over 2013 levels, just like other urban water users.

Brown did, however, specifically mention golf courses, cemeteries and other "institutional properties" to make sure it's understood that they're covered by his order, too.

Sacramento's East Lawn Memorial Cemetery has already altered its manicured landscape to accommodate the drought. Since 2013, East Lawn has been watering less and, wherever possible, planting rock gardens and drought-resistant plants.

But the cemetery's management also knows families generally want to see nicely tended lawns when they pay their respects at a relative's grave.

"The green grass is what they expect when they come to visit their loved ones," said Lisa West, marketing director at East Lawn, which owns cemeteries in East Sacramento, on Greenback Lane and in Elk Grove. "We have a responsibility to our families to keep the spot pristine."

West said East Lawn expects its water usage to drop 65 percent compared with 2013, well beyond what the governor ordered, but the reduction has come at a price. A few trees have died, and there are some brown spots on the lawn, she said.

Sacramento's sports and entertainment businesses have also adapted to a drier climate. Bonney Field at Cal Expo, the year-old home of Sacramento Republic FC, was built with a water-recycling system to limit water use. The California State Fair discontinued its lagoon boat rides a few years ago, and the waterway will run largely or completely dry during this year's fair, said Cal Expo spokeswoman Jennifer Castleberry.

Some golf courses have adopted "turf reduction" strategies, said Marc Connerly, head of the California Golf Course Owners Association. That means letting the rough go brown on some holes, along with the first 100 yards or so of the fairways.

Landscape companies and nurseries are having to rethink a business model that included large swaths of lawn and thirsty annuals. Those businesses are working to convince homeowners that there are ways to reduce water usage without sacrificing how their homes look.

"We can help them work through what they need to do," said Tami Kint, marketing director at Green Acres Nursery & Supply.

Kint said Green Acres staffers have been coaching customers on using proper fertilizers and mulches, and "choosing the right plants for the right place." By and large, the message is getting through.

"There's still interest," she said. "People are invested in their landscapes. ... They want to learn how to do it smarter."

Some landscape companies are keeping busy taking out people's lawns. Among other things, Brown's order calls on state officials to develop financial incentives so homeowners can replace lawns with "drought-tolerant landscapes," especially in "underserved communities."

Many homeowners already are moving in that direction, said Chris McKoy, of Chris KcKoy Landscape in Roseville.

"A lot of them are tearing out the yard and doing drought-tolerant," McKoy said.

At the same time, he said, some customers are plowing ahead with new lawns. Either way, his business hasn't dried up.

“People are still doing stuff,” he said. “I’m literally booked out six weeks.”

Brown’s directive says all newly constructed homes and buildings must rely on drip irrigation or “microspray systems” for landscape use. Homebuilders said they believe it’s a regulation they can work with.

“There are definitely sprays that use less water than others,” said Tim Lewis, president of Roseville homebuilder Tim Lewis Communities.

Lewis said the drought restrictions may prompt some homebuyers to rethink their entire approach to landscaping. “I would think less lawn,” he said.

Lewis said his company has installed artificial turf at some homes, but it’s more expensive than the real thing.

Meritage Homes is about to start a 130-lot residential community in Woodland that will stress more drought-tolerant plants and other landscaping features designed to save water.

“We can make it work,” said Barry Grant, the homebuilder’s regional president.

Other businesses have invested in water-recycling systems in anticipation of severe cutbacks. Harv’s Car Wash in downtown Sacramento, for instance, spent \$60,000 last year on a water-reclamation system that’s designed to cut usage by 45 percent.

“We’re doing our part, and we’ll still wash cars,” said owner Aaron Zeff.

Despite the drought, one water-related business reports that it’s faring surprisingly well. Sacramento swimming pool contractor Mike Geremia said potential pool owners remain undaunted by the prospect of filling a pool with 15,000 gallons of water or more.

Customers “are calling us left and right,” the president of Geremia Pools said. “The market is very solid.

“Did you know that swimming pools use less water than a lawn?” he added. “We can get out there and show people we’re water savers.”

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