

2021



Valley Water

Drought Summit

Together, our future is drought-proof.

Saturday, October 23,
9:30a.m. - 12:30p.m.

Nichols Research Presentation Water
Conservation in a Time of Drought



Methodology

- Three focus groups were held at the Nichols Research Sunnyvale office in late July and early August. Each group had 10 participants
 - One group was with homeowners who have a yard
 - One group was with people who live in multi-unit buildings
 - One group was with Property Managers within Santa Clara County

- Any questions can be sent to Michael Mermelstein at [**Michael@nicholsresearch.com**](mailto:Michael@nicholsresearch.com)

Current Efforts

- As consumers have become more accepting of the fact that they need to take actions to help conserve water there has been more interest among them in looking for programmatic ways they can help in conserving water.
- Efforts have been ongoing to build awareness and interest among consumers, with heightened interest/coverage by the media for the conservation programs.
 - It is not uncommon for people to believe that something such as drought is too big a problem for individuals or for those in small businesses to feel as if they can make a difference. Most people have heard of the concept that small change – making little dents in a problem – can ultimately have a big impact. People will respond if they believe that they can have an impact by taking small changes that will make a bigger difference when most people in a community are doing the same.



Acceptance of and Efforts to Manage Drought Emergency

- Everyone in these focus group are all very aware – and agree - that there is a drought emergency. Many also believe that drought conditions may well be permanent.
 - You can see it with your own eyes; ‘everything is brown and yellow’
 - *‘It’s happening, its reality, means water scarcity, happening faster than predicted’*
 - *‘Scary, severe risk, not manageable, constant threat’*
- Water companies are expected to – in fact, it is seen as their primary responsibility to deliver clean water safely and in an affordable way. Actions taken now have to look at long term impact as well as meeting an immediate need.
 - Water companies are expected to manage for the future, improve infrastructure to help achieve this, and to partner with the community in working towards conservation
- These respondents all feel that they know a lot of the steps they can take to help conserve water.
 - Most feel that they are already taking some small steps to help conserve water. This is true of homeowners and business/property managers. Even those who live in multi-unit residences believe that they are taking small steps to help



The New Normal

- All believe that it is fair to ask people to take steps to conserve water during the drought – and importantly for many – even in times when there is no drought emergency. Water conservation needs to become part of everyone’s new normal. Climate change should drive everyone to conserve. There is a belief that everyone has to help. Business, agriculture and consumers each need do their part. But they also know that they have a play a large role in helping to conserve water.
 - Frustration among consumers does build when there is a feeling that some groups (agriculture) are not doing their part when they are heavy users of water
- The immediate call to action for the drought emergency is important and necessary, but homeowner participants repeatedly emphasize the long-term importance of water conservation as a way of life.
- Consumer sentiment heard in these focus groups; We know climate change will result in more extreme droughts in the future and continue to threaten our water supplies..... We owe it to our children and grandchildren to make sure there is always enough water.
 - There is agreement with the concept that everyone needs to work together



Messaging

- Any messaging should prominently display a websites URL
- Property managers want messages that have a more direct tagline and message, one that shocks/scares people, one with a call to action:
 - “Don’t use fuzzy words and pictures”*
 - “If we want to get out of this, here’s what we need to do”*
 - “We can save you money”*
 - “You better wake up! This is real”*
- They want to hear about cost savings and efficiencies that can help their bottom line
- Messages might also include affordable steps they can take to conserve water *“beyond the obvious”*

Messaging *(Continued)*

- Residents on the other hand feel that messages should:
 - encourage water conservation as a way of life, rather than just in times of drought
 - Messages should emphasize that *“we are all in this together,”* and should be directed toward the whole community
 - Messages should be positive and *“caring”* rather than *“scolding or browbeating or with a bad attitude”*
 - Messages that use fear could be effective, but quickly wear thin and could trigger some people (e.g., fire survivors)
- Residents believe messaging should be a call to action. But the actions need to be what they see as ‘doable’ and include everyone
- Residents want to know how they can help beyond what they think they already know. If it is practical they will consider it, don’t hide information.



Educate

- A lot of people do not know how to start or where to go to learn more about what they can do, beyond the obvious.
- With property managers there is a persistent theme of “*education; you tell us / you are the experts*” is an approach that is welcomed by property/facility managers when it comes to water conservation and might be considered for messaging or website content.
 - Variations on this theme include desire to have expert advice on “*managing for the future,*” means of incentivizing to conserve water, dealing with increasing costs of water to remain a profitable business, ways of using water conservation methods to save money.
- This sense of needing more knowledge is also true of residents.
 - What plants are drought resistant
 - How best to replant or redesign landscape incrementally and affordably
 - How to assess the state of the drought through dashboards (e.g., akin to the Covid dashboards)
 - What resources exist, and how they can access them

THANK YOU

