

Californians failing at water conservation

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

As California slips into summer amid the worst drought in a generation, state residents, as a whole, have done relatively little to cut their water use, falling well short of the 20 percent target set in Gov. Jerry Brown's emergency drought declaration in January.

Between January and May of this year, California as a whole cut its water use 5 percent compared to the same period over the preceding three years, according to data released Tuesday during a meeting of the State Water Resources Control Board. The figures were drawn from a survey of water agencies across the state conducted by water board staff. The survey was sent to 443 water agencies but completed by only 270, representing about 25 million retail water customers.

Max Gomberg, a senior environmental scientist for the board, said water use actually increased statewide in January, a month that is normally the state's wettest but instead proved to be extraordinarily dry. During February through April – months immediately following the governor's drought declaration – there was no significant conservation. Water use statewide was essentially the same in those months as the prior three years.

Only in May did conservation seemingly take hold, with water agencies in aggregate reporting a water savings of 25 percent. That seems encouraging, but it was before the hot months of summer when water demand typically peaks.

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