

A Positive Approach For Dealing With Water Restriction Violators

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Water Issue

As the drought continues and the need for additional water supply becomes even more acute, there is more likelihood that local governments will have to resort to more and perhaps heavier fines for people who violate state and local government water restrictions. Thus the consumer who generally waters to enhance the value of his property and to improve the quality of life at his home and community is faced with the prospect of a fine. It is inevitable that environmentalists (euphemism for environmental groups and agencies) will become the focus of his/her ire. Some local officials and developers will add fuel by insisting that they cannot get new reservoirs developed because these same environmentalists will not let them build new reservoirs. This does nothing to resolve the problem. Rather, it diverts blame.

Water Conservation Opportunity

Providing good water conservation information is one way this issue, and it will be addressed. Education does not relieve the angst of persons fined for watering their lawn and garden during unauthorized times. This individual needs positive guidance, support and reinforcement.

One way to accomplish this is to create a local government alternative to fining citizens and to encourage more use of xeriscaping as an alternative to using less water in order to have a beautiful home.

Proposed Effort

The violator could be offered, and agree with, an opportunity to use monies generally paid to local government for fines to purchase native and drought resistant plants (xeriscaping). Thus, he/she would be able to channel his/her contempt in a positive manner by purchasing and planting less water demanding enhancements. The increased demand for xeriscape materials would be a market stimulus at local nurseries. Nursery owners would become more knowledgeable about xeriscaping and be able to guide their customers into water conserving planting.

Several ways to ensure the violator complies with his obligation without a significant burden to local government needs could be developed and suggested. For example:

After the violation has been resolved in the appropriate manner, the violators' record transferred to the local water department. As the violator purchases xeriscape materials, he/she provides a receipt and the record is amended to reflect this fact. Once the agreed upon amount has been attained, the record is cleared. Using the water department as part

of the process allows them to evaluate the impact on the water and financial side of their operation.

Develop a partnership with nurseries of the violators' choice and have the nursery note how much has been purchased to reflect the amount fined. When the agreed amount has been purchased, the local government agency is notified and the record is cleared.

Model legislation with additional suggested implementation methods could be developed for local governments.

Potential Partners

Such a process could be promoted by:

- Georgia Municipal Association
- Association of County Commissioners
- State legislature
- Local governments
- Water utilities

Downside Issues

Some feeling exists that local government depends too much on water as a revenue source so there may be a reluctance to develop such programs

The value of xeriscaping plant materials is not as great as the value of plants requiring more water, particularly annuals, so nurseries may not be anxious to participate.

However, the water situation is serious and behavioral change must occur. Finding positive ways to make this transition are needed as much as policy change.