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Water is a valuable resource in Santa Barbara County and around the world. All living things need water to survive and flourish. However, water is also a limited resource. People all around the world place different demands on water from drinking water to using it in industrial processes. Although water is used for many different purposes, there are two general categories of water use in the county: urban and agricultural. A description of water usage, along with information on water efficiency programs and tips, is listed below.

Urban Water Use
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Urban Water Use

Urban water use (also known as Municipal & Industrial, M&I) includes commercial, industrial, residential and institutional uses. Most M&I use is supplied by water purveyors, though a small number of people have private groundwater wells or belong to a mutual water company that serves their water.

Per-Capita Use

Per-capita use is the average amount of water used by individual residential customers each year, including water that they do not directly use but which benefits them (such as fire fighting, park and school irrigation, commercial water use and other M&I water uses). Per-capita use is usually derived by dividing the total M&I use by the total service area population. Per-capita demand (use) rates are calculated on an annual basis. Evaluating per-capita use is an important way to track water use trends and monitor the effectiveness of water use efficiency programs because per-capita rates factor out the influence of growth – new customers – on fluctuations in demand.

The amount of water that is used by customers is influenced by a wide variety of factors: climate variations; the types of water using appliances, plumbing fixtures and irrigation systems used by customers; socioeconomic differences among customers; the price of water; customer awareness of water resources and the need for efficiency; the presence or absence of droughts; varying behavior and beliefs of water users; and the types of programs in place to promote efficient use by the retail water purveyors. See the table below for detailed information regarding per-capita residential water use by water purveyor.

Santa Barbara County Historical Per-Capital Water Use							
Gallons/Person/Day							
	1992*	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**
City of Buellton	230	227	213	228	232	253	206
Golden State Water Co.	199	193	235	229	249	343	205
Carpinteria Valley Water District	108	113	130	130	127	131	120
Cuyama CSD	183	NR	187	188	205	238	180

Goleta Water District	98	107	101	140	161	131	103
City of Guadalupe	108**	96**	NR	72	83	88	79
La Cumbre Mutual Water Company	241	241	283	250	259	307	229
City of Lompoc	113	112	114	112	120	109	97
Los Alamos CSD	NR	NR	160	218	191	170	NR
Mission Hills CSD	170	175	174	168	NR	NR	151
Montecito Water District	268	269	199	270	249	325	261
City of Santa Barbara	99	104	109	115	120	126	111
City of Santa Maria	168	165	155	159	173	137	129
Santa Ynez River WCD, ID#1	212	NR	327	NR	198	366	267
City of Solvang	353	353	NR	252	262	262	217
Vandenberg Village CSD	192	179	179	179	206	NR	160
NR: Not reported _____*First post-drought year ___**Based on water production, not sales/use (per City of Guadalupe)							

Agricultural Water Use

Agricultural use refers to all water used for crop irrigation and production/processing. In Santa Barbara County, most agricultural water supplies are obtained from private groundwater wells. Some farmers on the South Coast buy some or all of their water from a water purveyor. Information about total agricultural water use in the county is derived from two sources: 1) water purveyors that serve farmers, and 2) estimates of irrigation water use based on consumptive use factors for each crop type (provided by the Department of Water Resources and the U.C. Cooperative Extension) multiplied by the number of acres of various crops in the county (obtained from the annual Crop Report published by the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office).For more information, please see "Water Resources for Santa Barbara County" (Santa Barbara County Water Agency, July 2000).

Future Water Use

The amount of water used in Santa Barbara County varies from one area to another and from one year to the next. Information about how and where water is used for different purposes is collected and compiled by the Santa Barbara County Water Agency (SBCWA). Every year, the SBCWA gathers water production (how much water is produced from each source) and demand (how much water is used by metered customers) figures from water purveyors throughout the county. The data collected from each retail water purveyor includes water produced from all sources, water delivered to all customers by class (single-family, multi-family, commercial, industrial, and landscapes) and the total number of customers.

Understanding water use, and predicting future water demand, is not an exact science. It is nearly impossible to account for or predict all of the variable factors that influence water use. Municipalities and water purveyors must develop estimates based on their best knowledge of water use patterns and project growth rates in their service areas. Some communities in California have developed water use forecasting models that are designed to calculate future demand based on a variety of assumptions about population, water efficiency programs, water prices, and climate. As water becomes more scarce and expensive, these models will be refined and more communities will use such models in planning for how they will meet the future needs of their customers.

Water Efficiency

The semiarid climate, periodic droughts and high cost of water locally make efficient use of valuable water supplies essential. During periods of drought, water efficiency (or conservation) is heavily relied upon. Efficient water use means that all water consumers use only the amount of water required to meet their needs. Water consumers include farmers, residents, businesses, schools, municipalities, parks and others. Efficient use of water results in little or no waste.

Some benefits of using water efficiently include saving energy, reducing flow into wastewater treatment facilities, and minimizing the need to develop new supplies, with associated costs, to meet expanding needs. Individual water consumers can also benefit by saving money on their water and energy bills when using water efficiently.

Efficient use of water entails responsible design of landscapes and appropriate choices of appliances, irrigation equipment and the other water-using devices that enhance our lives. In recent years, laws have been passed that require efficient plumbing devices, appliances, and landscape designs. However, it is still up to individual water consumers to use water wisely and minimize waste.

Click on the links on the left bar to find out more about programs offered to increase water use efficiency in Santa Barbara County.