



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** May 22, 2007

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT:** WATER-WISE AND FIRE-WISE LANDSCAPING AT COUNTY FACILITIES

#### **SUMMARY:**

##### **Overview:**

Dwindling water supplies and destructive wildfire are constant concerns in semi-arid San Diego County. A lingering drought has increased calls for greater water conservation and given new rise to the threat of catastrophic wildfire. The Colorado River Basin, which supplies one-third of Southern California's drinking water, has suffered through its worst seven consecutive years of drought in nearly a century. Cal Fire warns that, in addition to the drought, a lingering bark beetle infestation has exacerbated fuel loads in local forests and other wildlands. Today's action explores the feasibility of mandating drought tolerant and fire resistant landscaping for all new County projects including active parks, libraries, and roadways.

##### **Recommendation(s):**

##### **VICE CHAIRMAN GREG COX AND SUPERVISOR DIANNE JACOB**

1. Direct the CAO to explore the feasibility of mandating drought tolerant and fire resistant landscaping for all new County projects, including all active parks, libraries and roadways and report back to the Board in 60 days.

##### **Fiscal Impact:**

This action can be performed using existing resources.

##### **Business Impact Statement:**

N/A

##### **Advisory Board Statement:**

N/A

#### **BACKGROUND:**

**SUBJECT: WATER-WISE AND FIRE-WISE LANDSCAPING AT COUNTY FACILITIES**

Dwindling water supplies and catastrophic wildfire are constant concerns in semi-arid San Diego County. A lingering drought in the Western U.S. has increased calls for greater water conservation and given new rise to the threat of wildfire.

Up to 90 percent of the San Diego region's water is imported from the Colorado River and Northern California. The Colorado River Basin, which supplies one-third of Southern California's drinking water, has suffered through its worst seven consecutive years of drought in nearly a century, according to the Federal Bureau of Reclamation which manages the river. The California Department of Water Resources reports that the water content in the Sierra Nevada snowpack is at its lowest level in nearly 20 years— less than 40 percent of usual for the month of April.

At 3.85 inches to date, the seasonal rainfall total in San Diego County is less than a third of normal. Normal to date is 10.43 inches.

The San Diego County Water Authority reports that 60 percent of residential water in San Diego County is used outdoor for landscape irrigation— more than 58 billion gallons of water per year. The agency recognizes low-water landscaping as an important conservation measure.

In addition, years of drought and a massive bark beetle infestation have raised the threat of catastrophic wildfire in local forests and other wildland areas, according to Cal Fire. In the wake of the 2003 Cedar and Paradise fires, the County secured millions of dollars to remove dead trees from fire prone areas. Despite the removal of some 500,000 trees, the fire threat remains alarmingly high.

Fire officials are reminding all homeowners, particularly those in fire prone areas, to clear 100 feet of defensible space around homes and other structures. As many homeowners learned during the 2003 fires, defensible space dramatically increases a structure's chances of surviving a wildfire. Like defensible space, fire officials also are encouraging property owners to landscape using fire resistant vegetation, particularly native and California-friendly plants.

The Water Conservation Garden at Cuyamaca College is fast proving itself a tremendous local resource when it comes to saving water. In partnership with the San Miguel Fire Protection District, the garden recently unveiled a new Fire-wise Garden. The exhibit is designed to educate homeowners about fire resistant landscaping.

In addition to showcasing drought tolerant and fire resistant landscaping, the fire-wise exhibit is helping residents learn that keeping plants pruned and maintained is an important fire protection tool.

Other fire and water-wise gardening tools include keeping low-growing plants within 30 feet of structures, removing dead and dying vegetation, properly spacing plants and using water efficient irrigation methods.

The County can and should employ these same plants and practices when landscaping new County projects, including all active parks, libraries, and roadways. Today's action explores the feasibility of using drought tolerant and fire resistant landscaping for all new County projects. A water-wise and fire-wise County government will undoubtedly save water and has the very real potential to save taxpayer dollars by cutting down on landscaping costs. It might also save lives.

We urge your support.

**SUBJECT: WATER-WISE AND FIRE-WISE LANDSCAPING AT COUNTY FACILITIES**

Respectfully submitted,

**GREG COX**  
Vice-Chairman, First District

**DIANNE JACOB**  
Supervisor, Second District

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**CONCURRENCE(S)**

<b>COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	
Written Disclosure per County Charter Section 1000.1 Required	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Requires Four Votes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

**Other Concurrence(s):** N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** Districts One and Two

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