

Drinkable Water Will be Oil of 21st Century

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A 1982 paper predicted lack of potable water will be fighting words in 21st Century. Vancouver BC and its 117 inches of annual rainfall is one of largest fresh water sources on Earth. But, Canadian law forbids pipeline into U. S.

Los Angeles in a bid to cut down on water use by residents and businesses will quadruple fines for businesses and double them for residents and put 16 water police on patrol who will first hand out warnings, then cite people don't listen and respond. Among other restrictions, lawns may not be watered between nine a.m. and four p.m., and restaurants won't be offering free water anymore.

A decade ago "Water Police" roamed Santa Barbara streets tagging leaky water bibs, threatening residents with the temerity to wash their car in their own driveway, and a man names "Doctor Dirt" painted lawns green with vegetable dye. The Santa Barbara City Council spent \$35 million on a reverse osmosis desalination plant that was immediately mothballed and now may spend \$200,000 to "study" whether it can be brought back on line.

San Diego wants to build a \$300 million desalination plant. Environmental Science and Technology on line points out desalination's very high costs. Electricity. It says, accounts for 44% of the typical costs of producing drinking water with plants that use reverse osmosis. An energy rate hike of 25% pushes up water prices. Also, desalination can have environmental consequences. The discharge of the highly salty waste brine-often laced with chemicals and metals-can harm fish populations and accumulate in the food chain, the report points out.

Water will return as a planning issue. In Cambria, near San Simeon's Hearst Castle, water meter's were granted on a lottery system when the tiny tourist town opted out of the Colorado River water pipeline. All over water became and will again become a tool to limit growth and restrict development.

Governor Schwarzenegger is using the drought to promote a \$12 billion bond issue that would fund new dam projects. The scheme is opposed by Democrats, who predictably argue that conservation is more important.

California has suffered drought-like conditions for several years, this winter was one of the driest on record. Rainfall in the Golden State during the winter months was 1.2 inches, or 22 per cent of the average for the 114 years since records began.

California and the West experienced periodic drought in 1987-89, 1976-1979, 1934 that created the fabled dust bowl as well as lesser droughts in the 1950s, and the devastation of the 1880s. What many people don't recognize, however, is that over the past 400 years droughts have occurred several times per century (Priest et al., 1993; NOAA Paleoclimatological Program, 2000).

The politically correct explanation is this drought, the recent wildfires are a consequence of anthropomorphically induced climate change. What is certain is Californians are running out of potable water, nothing was done since the last drought and all sorts of harebrained schemes will be reintroduced. Then it will rain.