

## The Water Cops

---

### Article

---

#### PART 1

**LOS ANGELES, California.** There's a new group of police officers patrolling the neighborhoods of Los Angeles, California. They're called "water cops," and they're looking for careless gardeners. The water police enforce the city's strict water conservation laws. Since California is struggling with an extended drought, these laws are more important than ever.

There are 15 police officers on water duty. They prowl neighborhoods and respond to thousands of tips. Officials estimate that in Los Angeles, landscaping accounts for as much as 70 percent of household water bills. Therefore, officers look for people who use sprinklers wastefully or use water outside unnecessarily.

Water is a precious commodity everywhere. That's especially true where there is a shortage, as in California. In June 2008, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger declared a statewide drought. He blamed below-average rainfall, low snow-melt runoff, and shrinking reservoir levels.

Los Angeles is a particularly thirsty city because of its expanding population. People used to get their water from the Los Angeles River. But there's not enough water in the river to supply the rapidly growing population. The city and surrounding area owes its existence to vast quantities of water piped in from the Colorado River and other sources. Conservation has always been important. During a drought, it becomes essential.

Conservation efforts are nothing new in Los Angeles. In the early 1990s, city officials unveiled a program called "drought busters." Officials soon realized they needed to get tougher. Why? The voluntary conservation program yielded only a 4 percent drop in water use.

In the summer of 2008, just after Governor Schwarzenegger declared the drought, officials placed limitations on water use. Offenders can now be cited with warnings or hit with fines. These fines start at \$100 and automatically appear on water bills. Through enforcement of water laws, the water conservation team aims to inform people about the importance of saving water.

"They're in fact educators ...to the public," said H. David Nahai. He oversees the team of officers. The team's goal is to see a 10 percent drop in water use.

Getting people to obey water conservation rules is still difficult. Many people in Los Angeles feel it is important to have beautiful green lawns and flourishing gardens. Department of Water and Power officer Alonzo Ballengar has seen general resistance to water conservation. Ballengar says that some of the people he accuses of water waste turn out to be hired gardeners. Their employers want the lawn to be watered each day. Ballengar also came across a case where a woman was draining and refilling her pool every three days for no apparent reason.



Photo credit and all related images:  
AP Photo

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power conservation team member Alonzo Ballengar (right) catches a gardener using too much water in Los Angeles.

Sometimes, residents try to help enforce the law. In one case, a resident reported four of his water-wasting neighbors in regular order every week. In another case, a group of dedicated conservationists appointed themselves citizen busters and patrolled their own neighborhoods. They called the water police when they saw anything from broken sprinklers to mysterious puddles of water.

Ballengar says that no one is safe from inspection. On a recent afternoon, Ballengar drove into the gates of the community where Governor Schwarzenegger lives. Ballengar stopped for a moment in front of the governor's mansion. He peered through the iron gate, searching for any evidence of water waste in the garden.

"Nothing," he said, before driving on.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

## **PART 2**

### **Dig Deeper**

Six years later, water is still in short supply. In April 2015, Governor Jerry Brown ordered cities and towns across California to reduce their water use. He did so in the Sierra Nevada. He was standing on bare, dry grass. About 2 meters (6.5 ft.) of snow should have been covering the field.

California is not alone. Most nations in the deserts of northern Africa and in the Middle East have severe water shortages. These are some of the driest regions on Earth. But their populations are growing. They need more and more water as cities grow. Water that could be used to grow food is piped instead to the growing cities. It is needed in homes and factories. Egypt was once a center of agriculture. Today, it imports 40 percent of its grain.

Water shortages are a serious problem. But the situation is not entirely hopeless. Conserving can solve a big part of the problem. What is conservation? It is action taken to protect and preserve the natural world. To conserve water means to use less of it. An average American uses about 168 liters each day. This is higher than in most parts of the world. Note that more than 8 of those liters are wasted by leaking toilets. This is 5 percent of the total amount used per day.

Think about what you already know about the water cycle. What happens when aquifers are used up faster than the water in them can be replaced naturally? What about lakes and rivers? Available fresh water from these water supplies goes down. Water supplies in many areas are being used up. This makes conservation a serious issue.

People conserve water in three ways:

- They use less water. Some cities conserve their supply of water by repairing leaks in underground pipes.
- They reuse water. Many cities reuse treated wastewater. They use it for landscaping.
- They recycle water. It is used again for the same purpose.

People can conserve water on farms. They can also conserve it in industry and at home. Farmers can use drip irrigation instead of spraying water. Most industries can use water at least twice before returning it to a river or lake. For example, water is used to cool machines. This water can be recycled back through the same system. People can change their plumbing and their habits. Repairing leaking pipes and dripping faucets can reduce water use greatly.

By 2025, there will be about 2.8 billion people without enough water. That's five times as many as there are now. Public officials and experts can help manage water use. They can enforce fair laws. For example, what happens when a river flows from one state into another? What if it crosses a national border? In such a situation, people must agree to share the water rights.

## **Dictionary**

**cite** (verb) to bring something up in support of an argument

**commodity** (noun) something that can be bought and sold

**enforce** (verb) to make people observe a law

**landscaping** (noun) improved scenery as a result of gardening efforts such as planting trees or flowers

**shortage** (noun) a lack

**water cycle** (noun) the ongoing movement of water through Earth, its atmosphere, and the living things on Earth

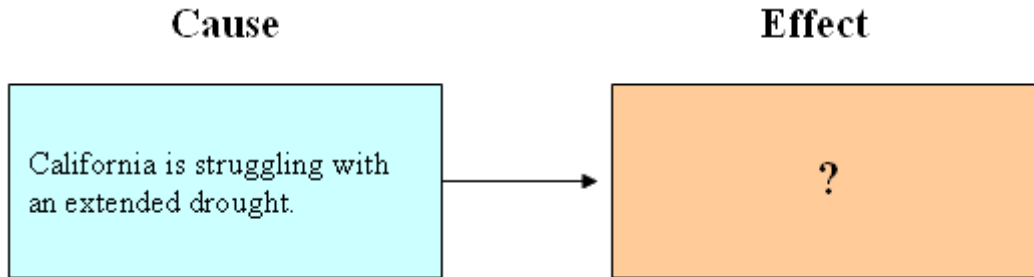
---

## Activity

---

### PART 1

Question 1



Based on the article, which best replaces the question mark in the diagram above?

- Ⓐ Gardeners use sprinklers only when the water police tell them there is enough water.
- Ⓑ People with gardens and lawns must get their water from rain and snow-melt runoff.
- Ⓒ The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is piping less water from local rivers.
- Ⓓ Some police officers in Los Angeles are enforcing water conservation laws in the city.

Question 2

What is this article mainly about?

- Ⓐ Water piped from rivers makes it possible for large cities in California to exist.
- Ⓑ Water police are working to make sure people obey water conservation laws.
- Ⓒ Many people in Los Angeles hire gardeners to water their lawns each day.
- Ⓓ Sprinklers are responsible for the largest portion of all household water bills.

Question 3

The article states:

**Offenders can now be cited with a warning or hit with fines. These fines start at \$100 and automatically appear on water bills.**

Why did the author include this information?

- Ⓐ To show the reasons why voluntary programs in California were not tough enough
- Ⓑ To describe one way that Los Angeles is trying to enforce water conservation laws
- Ⓒ To show how the limitations on water use are helping homeowners with gardens
- Ⓓ To describe the duties of the Los Angeles Police Department during a severe drought

Question 4

The article states:

**Water is a precious commodity everywhere.**

Which would be the closest **synonym** for the word precious?

- (A) Abundant
- (B) Standard
- (C) Valuable
- (D) Obvious

Question 5

Which question is **not** answered by the article?

- (A) Which offenders have been fined for breaking water conservation laws?
- (B) Why wasn't the voluntary conservation program successful in the 1990s?
- (C) What does Governor Schwarzenegger blame for the drought in California?
- (D) What makes up much of the water waste that takes place in Los Angeles?

Question 6

Which of these is **most** important to include in a summary of this article?

- (A) Officials are trying to enforce strict water conservation laws in Los Angeles.
- (B) Officials say that hired gardeners often waste water on lawns and gardens.
- (C) Some people in Los Angeles try to help enforce water conservation laws.
- (D) One Los Angeles woman drained and refilled her pool every three days.

Question 7

Which is the closest **antonym** for the word enforce?

- (A) Respect
- (B) Neglect
- (C) Hasten
- (D) Propose

Question 8

Based on the article, which is most likely to happen?

- Ⓐ If the drought continues, people in Los Angeles will probably water their gardens at noon every day.
- Ⓑ If the drought continues, people will probably plant gardens that do not require a lot of water.
- Ⓒ Governor Schwarzenegger will probably ask officials to stop using water from nearby rivers.
- Ⓓ Governor Schwarzenegger will probably reverse all conservation laws that are currently in place.