

Editorial from the Dallas Morning News

Soak the Wastrels: City needs to hike tiered water rates

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Politicians don't like to pinch their constituents. We've got that part down. But what we don't get is why they don't pinch us when it makes sense.

Look at Dallas' water situation. The city's going to need additional sources within 25 or 30 years. For now, we should be conserving as much as possible. Conservation won't get us all the way there, but it sure can help. Dallas ranks highest among major Texas cities for how much water each citizen consumes.

Affluent residents particularly consume more water. They use it to water large lots. They use it for swimming pools. They use it for decorative fountains. A recent North Texas survey found that residents in higher-use neighborhoods consumed 4.5 times the amount of outdoor water in hot weather as residents in lower-use neighborhoods. (The survey included Dallas.)

It's time to start pinching us harder. That means changing the amount Dallasites pay for their water. The city has four water rates. If you use less, you pay less per gallon. If you use more, you pay more per gallon.

Example: If you use 4,000 gallons a month, you pay \$4.52, which is \$1.13 for each 1,000 gallons. If your neighbor uses 6,000 gallons, he pays \$8.26, which is the same price you pay for the first 4,000 gallons, plus \$1.87 per 1,000 gallons for the rest. Your average cost per 1,000 gallons is \$1.13. His is \$1.38.

We like the concept, but the current rates aren't working. One Dallas official tells us they are too elastic. If you've got cash to spend, you're not going to feel a pinch. You're just going to keep that spigot open, morning, noon and night.

That's why the City Council needs to increase the amount high-use consumers and businesses pay. We recommend a change for big consumers as part of next year's budget.

The beauty of this is that it's voluntary. You don't have to pay more if you don't use more.

There's nothing wrong with that. Heck, council members won't even have to pinch their constituents. It's all up to us.

Dallas' residential water rates

1 gallon to 4,000 gallons:
\$1.13 per 1,000 gallons

4,001 gallons to 10,000 gallons:
\$1.87 per 1,000 gallons

10,001 gallons to 15,000 gallons:
\$2.50 per 1,000 gallons

15,001 gallons and above:
\$3.24 per 1,000 gallons