

We are all in this together

Poll finds support for tough water-use rules is extremely high

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We have received the message: This drought is a crisis. How else to explain the extraordinary support enjoyed by some of the toughest water-use restrictions in more than a decade?



JASON PAYNE/PNG

Neighbours should not hang their heads in shame, but instead be proud of those dry, brown lawns, as the vast majority of B.C. residents support wateruse restrictions during this drought crisis. It's the green lawns that are drawing hateful stares and acts of online shaming.

"Usually when you apply restrictions to the way people live their lives you see around one person in five will say 'it's an intrusion, it's not necessary,'" said pollster Mario Canseco of Insights West. "But this seems to play to our self-image in B.C., where we are more environmentally conscious than the rest of Canada."

Metro Vancouver has implemented Stage Three watering restrictions in response to fast-draining water reservoirs and a Level Four drought in southwestern B.C., the most extreme rating.

Here's what we think about that:

Widespread support

Fully 95 per cent of British Columbians support or strongly support tough water-use restrictions aimed at preserving drinking water. A paltry three per cent oppose the restrictions. About 90 per cent of Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley residents say the \$250 fine for breaking the rules is either appropriate or too low. More than one third of all respondents support even greater penalties.

Above and beyond

Many British Columbians are taking steps beyond obeying water use rules; they are taking individual action. About half of respondents are using the dishwasher and washing machine less and more than 60 per cent of us are taking shorter showers. Folks 55 and over are most likely to take actions above and beyond the regulations. More than 90 per cent of Metro Vancouver residents say they are observing the district's ban on watering lawns and washing boats and cars.

Watching the neighbours

When people take action in response to a crisis, they are not oblivious to the actions of their neighbours, Canseco explains. We are watching like hawks for violators, even shaming people with green lawns on social media, a trend that appears to have spread from California. Forty per cent of respondents have observed a neighbour break the ban on watering lawns and 20 per cent have seen people washing their cars. Complaints to municipal snitch lines have run into the thousands.

Local Government gets credit

About seven in 10 respondents think their local municipality is doing a good job of managing the water supply. However, Fraser Valley residents are far less enthusiastic, with only 42 per cent happy about the job Metro Vancouver is doing and only 21 per cent happy about the provincial government. That deep well of unhappiness appears to stem from the very public fight being waged over bulk water exports by Swiss food and beverage giant Nestlé — 265 million litres of water drawn annually from a local aquifer, said Canseco.

