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A/C tech Albert Liang inspects the cooling towers that line the helicopter pad on the roof of Metro Headquarters. Water for Metro's 1700-ton air conditioning unit is maintained at 50 degrees to keep the unit working properly. *Photos: Gayle Anderson*

## Metro Employees Asked to Help Curb the Flow to Conserve Water in LA County

- Air conditioning takes biggest pull of water at Metro Headquarters

By Laura Kloth  
*Staff Writer*

A stringent water conservation effort was officially launched June 1 in Los Angeles County, and Metro's building and facility leaders will be among the first working hard to comply.

As part of the measure, all county residents including government and businesses, are being asked to help the county reduce water consumption by 15 percent.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) measure means lawn sprinklers will be turned on only on Monday and Thursday. Violators should expect to face hefty rate increases if they fail to comply.



When it gets extremely hot or humid, the massive air conditioning system that cools Metro Headquarters lets off a little steam through the cooling towers on the roof.

**Watch your thermostat**

This is the third year Southern California has faced a water shortage, and, as summer temperatures climb, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor Robert Skarseth, who is responsible for overseeing Metro Headquarters, wants to remind Metro employees that room temperature is directly related to water use.

The lower the thermostat is set to cool down a room, he said, the greater the amount of water necessary to run through the unit coils to complete the process.

“We’re trying to get our air conditioning in line where we could keep it at a constant temperature to use less water,” said Skarseth.

Ideally, thermostat settings should be set between 72 to 75 degrees, but somebody in management would have to determine that as being Metro’s official building standard to make it policy, he said, adding his department gets several requests each day to make adjustments.



A/C Tech Lead Henry Chu explains that the air conditioning system that regulates Metro Headquarters temperatures is water-cooled.

A/C Tech Lead Henry Chu explains that the air conditioning system at Metro Headquarters is heavily dependent on water since it is water cooled. The 1700-ton system is like a mammoth radiator that uses approximately 1,000 gallons of water on a typical warm day, but when demand is high, that could increase to 1,500 gallons or as much as 2,000 gallons.

Metro’s system includes a configuration of chiller units situated on a floor near the top of the building which funnel water

through large pipes that lead to several cooling towers on the roof. When it gets extremely hot or humid, steam can be seen from the roof of the Metro Headquarters building, Chu explains. "The greater the demand for cooling, the greater the water consumption," he said.

Skarseth says a little patience can go a long way, he notes. Sometimes when the sun shines on people on the west side of the building, they immediately think it should be colder in the room, he says. "Some people like it really, really cold in their office," he said. Other times, when the skies are overcast, employees call about being too cold, when the temperature really isn't any different than it was the previous day.

**"Reduce, Reuse, Recycle"**

Metro's Metro Headquarters water and sewer bill for March alone amounted to more than \$8,000, and it remains to be seen how that will be impacted by the DWP's water conservation measure.

One of the greater challenges will be maintaining the 109 miles of irrigation lines throughout Metro's transitway, including those within the 77 acres of landscaping on the Orange Line. Director of Facilities Maintenance Brady Branstetter said his department fully supports Metro's sustainability policy of "reduce, reuse and recycle."

As it stands, his department has alerted employees and contractors about the DWP measure and will monitor water use and determine what measures should be made periodically to keep water use and costs down.

One proposal is to install rain sensors to shut down the irrigation or sprinkler systems when it rains, to conserve water. "That's an opportunity for automating a requirement of the ordinance," Branstetter said.

Another, involves obtaining a source of recycled water for irrigation that did not exist in 2005 when the Orange Line opened. When the Orange Line was built, Metro installed purple piping, designating it to be used with recycled water, but it has yet to identify a sufficient source of recycled water. "The Agency was once again ahead of the curve on an environmental issue," Branstetter said.



Metro's 1700-ton air conditioning unit includes a configuration of chiller units situated on a floor near the top of the building which funnel water through large pipes that lead to several cooling towers on the roof.





Metro has been using recycled water to wash buses and vehicles for about 10 years, said Director of Capital Project Facilities Tim Lindholm.



Metro officials have decided that daily bus washing is not necessary, and, instead, buses will be washed every other day to save the agency more than \$250,000 in DWP charges annually. In addition, Metro is installing waterless urinals, low flow toilets and automatic faucets throughout its facilities.

“Wherever we can, we try to put in new technology,” Lindholm said. Waterless urinals, like the ones installed at Division 9 Transportation and Sector offices, are expected to save as much as 40,000 gallons of water per year per unit.

**Sweep and clean**

The Metro Board also adopted a policy to construct any new building that is 10,000 square feet or greater to be LEED certified, requiring lower water and energy consumption.



Steven Noonan of ProLogis, a Metro consultant responsible for maintaining Metro Headquarters building grounds and parking, said his department’s water conservation plan began a year ago when the DWP conducted an audit which produced a few water saving changes. For example, instead of washing down asphalt and pavement with hoses, employees are now using water-efficient brooms to clean and keep dust away.



Metro will also be receiving an \$11,000 grant from the DWP to improve the water irrigation systems around Metro buildings and grounds.

“We’re going to go by the letter of the law,” Noonan said.