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# CAPITAL news

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Friday, May 8, 2015 • kelownacapnews.com



With an eye to reduced reservoirs in the hills above Okanagan cities, the Make Water Work campaign launched Thursday. The focus is on educating homeowners about the range of drought-tolerant plants available at local greenhouses and garden centres.

See story page A3.

CAPITAL NEWS

## Belgo school lockdown

The Kelowna RCMP says it is investigating a "false report to police" which shut down Belgo Elementary School for part of Thursday.

The RCMP, the school and the local school district all refused to give details about the incident, what prompted it, what the false report was about or even how long the lockdown lasted. But an officer at the Rutland RCMP Community Policing station did confirm the lockdown took place and that it was over by

3:15 p.m.

The school said all the children who were at the school during the lockdown had gone home and no one was hurt in the incident.

According to Cpl. Joe Duncan, spokesman for the Kelowna RCMP, the report to police earlier in the day was investigated and found to be false. But he said he did not know what the report was about.

However, he said anyone found to make

a false report to the police faces a charge of mischief.

When contacted, the school district referred the matter to the RCMP and the school itself said staff were in a debriefing with police Thursday afternoon and no one was available to comment.

The woman who answered the phone at the school office would not say how long the school had been under the lockdown order.

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Close-Up

# Taking a hard look at the Okanagan's water needs

**Kathy Michaels**  
kmichaels@kelownacapnews.com

California's historic four-year drought is offering a bleak picture of what can happen when water supplies are over-taxed and Mother Nature seemingly gives up the ghost.

In an area that has at times been compared to the Okanagan for everything from its climate to culture, available water is at an all-time low thanks to years of below average precipitation.

Forests are drying up and trees are dying, adding more brittle vegetation to areas already threatened by wildfires.

It's a situation a climatologist quoted in the LA Times recently deemed "incendiary."

In urban areas, strict water restrictions are being implemented, while concerns about the viability of the state's agricultural offerings are becoming daily conversation fodder.

Conditions facing Californians read like the lead-up to any apocalyptic tale playing on the silver screen, and it's caused widespread concern this side of the border as well, explained Anna Warwick Sears.

Sears is the executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, a local government agency

focused on collaborative water resource management in the Interior, and as the face of all things H2O she's often handed community concerns.

"Different communities have different problems. The lucky thing for the water board is we don't have to deal with fracking, we don't have a big water bottling factory moving in—there are a lot of ways we are protected from things like that just because of our geography and being isolated," she said.

"Our big needs are residential water and agricultural water—those are the biggest sources of demand.

"It's not a crisis in the Okanagan right now, but what we want to do is make it normal to use water more efficiently and make water work.

"If we do, we will have much less risk of running in to a shortage."

With that in mind, valley mayors and councillors, the Okanagan Basin Water Board, water utilities and retail partners joined forces this week for an early launch of the Make Water Work conservation campaign.

Since it was kicked off in 2011, the Make Water Work campaign has focused on reducing the share of water that ends up on lawns and gardens—estimated to be around 25 per cent.

This year, the focus is on educating homeowners about the range of drought tolerant plants available at local greenhouses and garden centres, brought together as the Make Water Work plant collection.

A number of local nurseries from Armstrong to Osoyoos will offer drought resistant plants that thrive in the area, as well as strategies to go a more sustainable shade of green.

As Erin Trainer, a city councillor in Summerland pointed out, at the program kick-off Thursday, "brown is the new green."

Cutting back watering schedules and adding drought resistant plants may seem like a small effort, but Warwick Sears said conservation of water is simply the best way to avert a crisis.

"The absolute cheapest way of increasing the amount of water available is to get people to stop wasting it," she said.

"What we're asking with Make Water Work is not to have people stop gardening but to do it in a way that makes it so there is more water available for the other things we want and love."

When Warwick Sears was in California a few years ago drought issues were just coming to the fore, and she said they were talking about cutting down 30 per cent

of the avocado orchards outside San Diego.

"I thought that was horrible because I love avocados," she said.

"But at the same time I was walking around neighbourhoods and there was irrigation water running down the gutter to these overwatered lawns, it just seemed like such a shame that people were trading off overwatering for their avocado orchards."

West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater has been on his own restriction plan for some time, noting that one of his efforts has simply been to turn off the tap when he's brushing his teeth.

The district he presides over, however, is going to have to do that and more, and earlier this year than normal.

Findlater, who chairs the water board, said that the district's reservoir is sitting at 48 per cent of normal this year, and that set off alarm bells with his council.

The district immediately launched stage 1 water restrictions and is expecting to move to stage two fairly quickly. It's also looking at plans to expand its reservoir capacity, so shortages aren't a problem in the future.

"We are already in a dry area and this year we are facing challenges with low snowpacks, so this brings this whole issue



West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, said his municipality's water reservoir sitting at 48 per cent normal capacity this year set off alarm bells with his council about water conservation needs.

forward," he said. "It's manageable for the next year at least, but if we have another winter that's lower than average, then this puts pressure on the water storage. We're not California and we don't want to be."

In kicking off this year's MWW campaign, Findlater took the pledge at www.MakeWaterWork.ca and challenged fellow mayors from around the valley to do the same.

He also encouraged

residents to also join the effort. In addition to saving water, he noted there is a fun element where the community with the most pledges will be named "Make Water Work Champion."

And, the prizes are even better this year thanks to contest partners KelownaGardens.com, ProSource Irrigation, Bylands and, new this year, Eco-Turf offering more than \$8,000 in prizes, including a Grand Prize of a WaterWise yard

upgrade worth \$6,000.

The valley has less water available per person than anywhere in Canada but has some of the highest use in the country. And, 24 per cent of all water used in the Okanagan is used on household lawns and gardens with a lot of it wasted.

A contest to encourage people to "Take the Pledge" and reduce their consumption can be found online at www.MakeWaterWork.ca.

## Bylands nursery joins commitment to promote drought resistant plants

With the launch of the plant collection, residents are being offered a tangible way to make a difference every time they choose to purchase plants for their yard.

Carrying the drought resistant plant collection are:

- Blue Mountain Nursery in Armstrong
- Swan Lake Nurseryland in Vernon

- Kel-Lake Greenhouses in Lake Country
- Art Knapp in Kelowna
- Bylands Garden Centre in West Kelowna
- GardenWorks Penticton,

and

- Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos

"It's exciting to be part of such a unique project," said Mike Byland, sales manager at

the Bylands Garden Centre. "Water is a finite resource. We all have to be committed to using it responsibly," he said.

In fact, Bylands was the first

nursery in Canada to recycle water, installing three water recycling ponds allowing them to re-use about one third of their water use.

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# CAPITAL news PRINT THIS

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## Good to the last drop: When it comes to Okanagan water conservation, going green might just mean staying brown

By Kelowna Capital News

Published: **May 07, 2015 04:00 PM**

Updated: **May 07, 2015 04:174 PM**

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#### **A number of nurseries join forces to offer drought resistant plants to area consumers**

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