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**Carmichael Water District proposes rate hike**

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Carmichael Water District customers can expect to find a notice in their mailbox in the next few days informing them of a proposed water rate increase.

A number of factors, including cooler weather, the economic downturn and meter installation to meet the requirements of the state Water Conservation Act, have resulted in decreased water use and a significant drop in revenue, said Chris Nelson, district spokesman.

In response, the district proposes a water rate schedule that includes an 18 percent increase in revenue.

Even with severe budget cuts, officials said, the increase in revenue is necessary to cover operations and maintenance costs for the district's water system.

The Carmichael Water District, with 11,500 service accounts, supplies water to about 40,000 people in Carmichael and a small portion of Fair Oaks.

Nelson said the proposed rate increase would be placed on the service charge, or fixed portion of the bill, but there also would be a small increase in the consumptive charge.

The typical residential customer with a 1-inch meter would see an increase of about \$17.80 in the bimonthly bill, or about \$8.90 per month, Nelson said.

For most customers, he said, the new rates would be similar to those customers were paying before a metered rate went into effect.

Nelson said about 95 percent of the district's customers are using meters, and water use has decreased since meters were installed.

He said water use and revenue also have declined as a result of home foreclosures.

Nelson said notices of the proposed increase were mailed to customers Friday. A hearing on the proposal is scheduled for 7 p.m. Dec. 12 at the district office, 7837 Fair Oaks Blvd., Carmichael.

Under Proposition 218, the "Right to Vote on Taxes Act" approved by California voters in 1996, public agencies must reject an increase if written protests are submitted by a majority of landowners.

If approved, the rates would go into effect after the first of the year, Nelson said, and would be reflected in customers' bills beginning in February or March.

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