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Las Vegas Casinos Conserve Water Amid Drought



By **Kevin Byrne**, AccuWeather.com Staff Writer
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The drought that has plagued California and other areas of the western U.S. has not left Las Vegas unscathed, and now the city's primary water resource is in jeopardy.

The water levels in Lake Mead, which supplies 90 percent of the city's water, have been steadily decreasing over the past 14 years primarily due to the ongoing d conditions on the Colorado River.

Currently, the lake's water levels are just below 1,100 feet above elevation mark for the first water intake straw, which is one of tw rel and approaching the supplies water to the city. The intake sits at an elevation mark of 1,050 feet.



The iconic fountains run in front of Bellagio in Las Vegas on July 21, 2012. (Photo/Kristen Rodman)



The iconic fountains run in front of Bellagio in Las Vegas on July 21, 2012. (Photo/Kristen Rodman)

Drought conditions are nothing new for the city, which due to its arid climate averages only about 4 inches of rain per year. Through the first four months of 2014, roughly 0.31 of an inch of rain has fallen in the city and nearly two months have passed without measurable rainfall.

For casino resorts in town, described as the economic engine of the city, **water conservation isn't just an option, it's a necessity.**

During the early 1990s, resorts were one of the first sectors in the community targeted for conservation.

Any new resort that has been built since then is required to submit a water conservation plan as part of the approval process for construction.

Conservation techniques such as using water efficient technologies, minimizing landscaping, moving water features from outdoors to indoors among other measures are utilized.

"They need to be able to show us how and where they are working to save water," said Bronson Mack, a spokesperson for the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA).

All casino resorts in Las Vegas use roughly 7 percent of the local water resources. However, their actual water consumption is around 3 percent, according to Mack.

"Here in Las Vegas, we have a distinction between what we use, as far as water resources go, and what we consume," Mack said. "Because we recycle nearly 100 percent of our indoor water use."

At the 10 MGM Resorts properties in Las Vegas, they take many steps to be efficient with their water usage, including building and retrofitting many of their

operations to be water conservative.

Low-flow shower heads and toilets are installed in their hotel rooms and guests are offered the option to reuse towels, linens and bed sheets each day, according to MGM Resorts Spokesperson Yvette Monet.

The water for the iconic fountains at the Bellagio, does not come from municipal water, Monet said. Rather, it comes from an underground well, fed from its privately owned 8.5-acre lake, which holds 22 million gallons of water.

Annually, about 12 million gallons are replenished due to certain factors such as evaporation and leaky pipes.

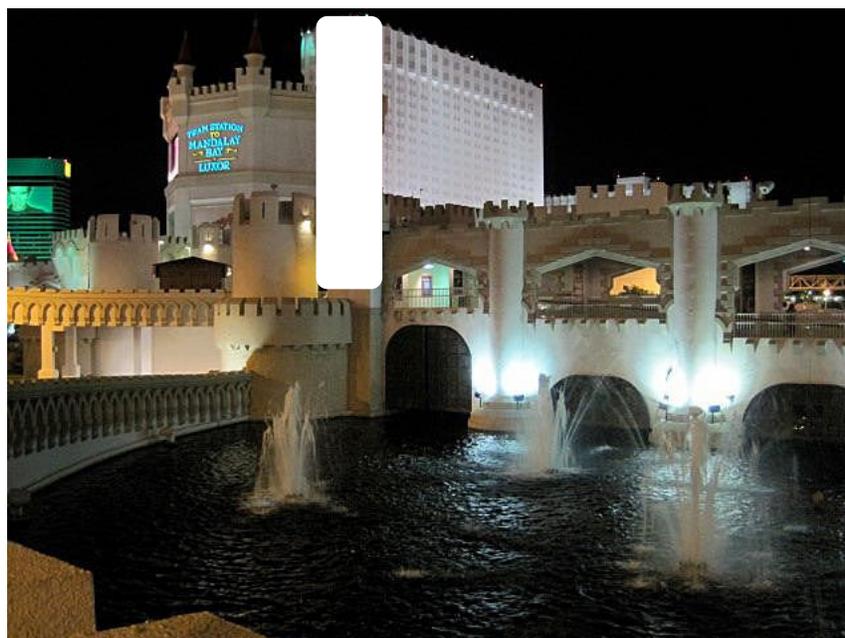
Similarly to MGM, Caesars Entertainment has implemented low-flow shower heads and toilets in their hotel properties worldwide, nine of which are in southern Nevada. Caesars also offers the policy of changing sheets and towels in hotel rooms upon request.

The company has tried to move away from water-intensive uses in its Las Vegas properties. With the exception of the fountain outside Caesars Palace, there are minimal exterior water features. Water-intensive landscaping, such as sod, has been converted to desert-style landscaping.

"We're definitely aware of water as an important resource, in trying to implement practices and technologies that ultimately reduce consumptive use," said Eric Dominguez, corporate director of facilities, engineering and utilities at Caesars Entertainment.

Southern Nevada accounts for about 70 percent of the state's economy, according to Mack. The resorts are a huge economic element to the entire state, but they only use a very small amount of the water resources.

"We believe that's a pretty good investment in water," Mack said.



Mandalay Bay fountains viewed at night in Las Vegas on July 21, 2012. (Photo/Kristen Rodman)

In fact, back in the early '90s, the resort industry helped fund the city's initial residential conservation programs, Mack said.

Due to the fact that indoor water is recycled, Las Vegas has been focusing conservation on outdoor water use. In 2002, the SNWA developed a drought response plan.

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Part of the plan includes strict water restrictions for irrigation on residential landscaping. In the winter, watering is limited to one day per week. During spring and fall, residents can water on three days a week, with specific neighborhoods assigned certain days of the week to water their properties.

In the summer, anyone can use water for irrigation any day of the week, so long as it's not between the hours of 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Another tactic used by the SNWA is a turf rebate program. Residents are paid to have grass removed and water-efficient landscaping installed. Through the life of the program, about 168 million square feet of grass has been converted.

Construction of a third water intake at Lake Mead began in 2008 in an effort to continue to draw water from the lake, even as levels potentially drop below 1,000 feet, which is where the second intake was built. Set to be complete in 2015, it will help protect municipal water customers from water quality issues as the lake's water levels decline.

While there isn't any reason for panic yet, officials will be closely monitoring the lake's water levels and the construction process of the third intake.

"Our primary concern has been ensuring that we're able to maintain access to the Colorado River and to those water resources," Mack said.

Dominguez said in the U.S., water traditionally has been a utility that's been under-priced and people haven't been as concerned with water use. But he sees a shift in thinking that is beginning to take place in terms of conservation efforts, especially in areas like southern Nevada, where water should be used

more smartly.

"It's something that we should be doing not only as an industry, but as a society of people that live here in this type of environment," he said.

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Matthew Kilburn · Top Commenter · Volunteer at Oakland County Animal Control & Pet Adoption Center

There have been droughts before, and there will be droughts again - just as this, too, shall pass and at some point water will once again flow over the spillway at Hoover Dam.

But its about time people got serious about confronting the absurdity of the idea of a "water shortage" on a planet where 70% of the surface area is covered by water, where the vast majority of the population lives no more than 200 miles from an ocean, major lake, or river.

So here's a suggestion: take all that extra infrastructure money that is constantly proposed to jump start the economy, and, rather than putting it into roads and rails, put it into the new desalination technologies and the construction of large-scale facilities and pipelines to ensure that future droughts can be combated with the flip of a switch, rather than starving the population for water and everything that needs it. We'll need more roads and rails at somepoint, too, obviously...but at the moment, those aren't holding back development.

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Brendan Karanasios · Top Commenter · Patent Analyst at Landon IP

Desalination is incredibly expensive due to high energy input. I think that water conservation is a fiscally smart first step, especially since the typical American uses double the water of their European counterparts.

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Valerie Ricker · Office Associate at Rick Ricker Termite and Pest Control

Brendan Karanasios We also shower more often and suffer from as many diseases. Wow! Isn't it amazing.

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Mark David Mattingly · Top Commenter · Thurston, Ohio

Reusing towels and sheets helps the hotel's bottom line more than anything else.

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John Holland · Top Commenter · SUNY Canton

so if there is a problem with drinking water levels at lake mead , does that mean hoover dam is a museum?

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Maurizio Armanetti · Istituto Europeo di Design

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