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## What prompts people to save water

**By Jerd Smith, Rocky Mountain News**  
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Which would prompt you to save water? High water prices or mandatory restrictions?

A new study indicates that restrictions may work at least as well as stiff prices, especially among high-volume, high-income users.

Since 2002, when Colorado witnessed one of the driest years of the 20th Century, communities across the state have wrestled with how best to encourage residents and businesses to learn to live with less.

Aurora, one of Colorado's most water-short communities, decided to ask researchers at the University of Colorado's Western Water Assessment to help them determine which tools worked best, either alone or in combination with other tools, such as rebates for water-saving appliances.

Researchers examined water use data from 10,000 households in Aurora.

Here are some of their findings:

- \* Using a simple tiered price system, where prices rise as use rises, causes people to cut back about 5 percent.
- \* When tiered systems are in place, mandatory restrictions generate another 10 to 15 percent of savings.
- \* Households that took advantage of rebates for water-efficient toilets, clothes washers and dish washers, reduced water use 10 percent.

"These are really important tools," said Chris Goemans, an economist and assistant professor at Colorado State University who co-authored the study with Doug Kenney, a University of Colorado researcher.

Though restrictions are surprisingly effective, Goemans said it is price, over the long-term, that is most likely to keep water use down as droughts come and go.

"Most economists would like to see prices go, so that people can determine how much water they want to use based on cost, not a restriction. Water is getting increasingly scarce. The price of things that are scarce go up. We live in a desert. That's the reality of it."

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