Heat Wave Is Melting Away Society’s ‘Civilized Veneer’

By The Associated Press

The relentless heat wave that has seared North Carolina for ten days is melting away the ‘civilized veneer’ that normally insulates society, leading to increased violence, according to the county psychiatrist said Tuesday.

“We’re getting down to a nature versus man type of thing,” said Dr. Walter Peckham, who heads the county health department. “You reach the point where you have a situation that technology, civilization and the intellect cannot address. It’s a deeper, more fundamental type of defense mechanism. When you do that, your reactions are more primitive, more infantile.”

Residents are asked to turn showers instead of tub baths to conserve water and “about a four minute shower is comfortable to most people,” said Everett Bingham, director of the Orange Water and Sewer Authority.

Mandatory conservation measures, which carry a penalty, “are primarily outside measures that can be monitored by the police as they drive by,” Bingham said, and include washing cars, filling pools, watering lawns.

“The heart of our conservation ordinance is one of voluntary cooperation. In looking at our water consumption the past few days it appears we are getting that cooperation,” he said.

Capt. Ralph Pendergraph of the Chapel Hill Police Department said a five-minute shower is “nothing anybody could be charged with.”

Pendergraph said he devised one conservation measure on his own. “I’ve started capturing the water from the air conditioner and using it to water plants,” he said.

Residents are also under orders to conserve water usage in Durham, Cherryville and Beenmore City.

Officials have proposed mandatory restrictions from noon Fridays to noon Mondays at Atlantic Beach to cope with water shortages that have hit the resort community on weekends.

Policemen in Fayetteville, Hope Mills and Spring Lake also have been asked to watch for residents sprinkling their lawns or gardens. When they spot sprinklers, they will ask residents to turn them off to conserve water.

Fayetteville’s Public Works Commission was forced to shut down one of two water plants over the weekend when a reservoir showed high readings of iron and manganese.

Ken Fain, head of water and sewer operations in Fayetteville, said Tuesday PWC officials “didn’t get the response we had expected” in calling for voluntary water conservation. He said a 12-million-gallon reserve tank at the one operating water plant was only 75 percent full.

Fain said if customers don’t cut their water use voluntarily, mandatory conservation may be needed. PWC officials are drafting an ordinance for mandatory controls that would need city council approval.

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