

Drought Management for Carwash Owners

One of the worst fears a carwash operator harbors is the fear that his or her business will be threatened by drought. Often, decision makers target industries such as the carwash industry during times of drought in order to help conserve water.

Carwash owners don't have to be the scapegoats, nor should they be. Below you will find some ideas you can use to help decision makers understand the carwash industry and, hopefully, protect your business and your industry when drought comes.

First, know your industry

- Know the statistics on carwash water usage, recapture rates, number of carwashes in your area, and what your industry - locally, regionally, and nationally - is doing to help conserve water.

Know who the decision makers are and educate them

- It is important for carwash owners to understand who makes policy decisions on drought management. In different states and localities, it could be the Governor, the Secretary of Natural Resources (or equivalent), or the local government. It does no good for owners to target the wrong decision makers.
- Many decision makers don't understand the carwash industry. Simply stated, they believe a carwash uses far more water than it actually does and pollutes groundwater more than it does. You need to help decision makers understand that carwash operators are leaders in water conservation and operate environmentally-friendly businesses.
- If handled properly, this process leads to a long-term, effective working relationship with the decision maker. The decision maker may also become an advocate for the carwash industry.
 - Carwash operators should be careful not to be antagonistic towards decision makers – this is a learning process for them.
 - You should present yourself and your industry as willing to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.
- Be proactive in your education efforts – don't wait until the threat is eminent before you start. As a matter of fact, the best time to educate is when there is no threat at all.

If possible, form a coalition

- Coalitions are more effective politically than individual people or businesses. There is power in numbers.
- Coalitions can be made with members of the same industry, with many businesses representing many industries, or with environmental and/or water conservation groups.

If the threat is eminent, begin a grassroots campaign

- Whether or not you create a coalition, you can (and probably should) engage in a grassroots campaign to protect your industry if the threat of shutdown is eminent.
- You (and your coalition partners if applicable), your employees, your clients, and your and their families can all be effective advocates for your cause. Anybody affiliated with you and your partners who pays taxes and votes is a potential advocate.
- E-mails, phone calls, speaking at public meetings, petitions, and letters to the editor are all effective tools you and your partners can use to keep your message in front of decision makers and the public.
- As with the coalition concept, there is power in numbers. The more individual contacts a decision maker receives the better.

- Avoid “form letters” – don’t send copies of the same e-mail or letter signed by 50 different people. These are not effective, but 50 individual letters and e-mails with the same overall message and different content ARE effective. **PERSONALIZE YOUR CONTACT!**
- Educating decision makers about your industry should be an important goal of your grassroots campaign.
- Remember that the same rules apply to a grassroots campaign and your education efforts. Be cordial rather than defensive, and show decision makers that you’re part of the solution rather than the problem.

In all these matters, honesty is the best policy.

Misleading decision makers may make them hostile and destroys your credibility. Decision makers are not likely to listen to your views in the future if they feel they have been misled by you in the past, which makes you more vulnerable in the future.