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W. Keith Lemieux
Counsel

HEADQUARTERS
4232 Las Virgenes Road
Calabasas, CA 91302
(818) 251-2100
Fax (818) 251-2109

WESTLAKE
FILTRATION PLANT
(818) 251-2370
Fax (818) 251-2379

TAPIA WATER
RECLAMATION FACILITY
(818) 251-2300
Fax (818) 251-2309

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Las Virgenes Municipal Water District Takes Action Against Water Theft

New ordinance enforces landmark Water Theft Law, putting violators on notice.

Contact: Public Affairs & Communications
publicaffairs@lvmwd.gov

Adrienne Burns | Director of External Affairs
818-251-2201 (w) 747-774-9773 (c) aburns@lvmwd.gov

For Immediate Release

May 7, 2026

Calabasas, Calif. – Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (LVMWD) took decisive action to enforce Senate Bill 394, the landmark water theft legislation co-sponsored by the District and signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom on October 10, 2025. Following a public hearing on April 7, 2026, the LVMWD Board of Directors introduced and passed Ordinance No. 291, formally updating LVMWD code to align with the new state law and put water thieves on notice that illegal diversions will carry serious consequences.

In recent years, LVMWD estimated losses of approximately 45 million gallons of water due to water stolen from unauthorized use of fire hydrants, primarily for commercial purposes including construction, landscaping and farming. Beyond the staggering volume of water lost, illegal hydrant diversions have the potential to damage infrastructure, reduce system pressure, and risk contamination of the public water supply, affecting every ratepayer and resident that LVMWD serves.

"Water theft is not a victimless crime. It is a direct threat to the reliability and safety of the water system that 70,000 residents depend on every day," said LVMWD Board President Andy Coradeschi. "With this ordinance now in place, we have the tools to act swiftly and decisively against anyone who steals from our system and thereby potentially threatens the health of our ratepayers. The era of low-consequence water theft in our service area is over."

What the Law Does

Under previous law, fines against water theft were insufficient to deter water theft. This ordinance updates the LVMWD Code to incorporate the full enforcement framework authorized by SB 394, which took effect January 1, 2026. Key provisions now enforceable by the District include:

- **Enhanced fines:** Under SB 394, fines reach up to \$2,500 for first-time violations and up to \$10,000 for repeat offenses, targeting commercial operators engaged in illegal hydrant use.

- **Strict prohibition on water theft:** Each act of water theft constitutes a misdemeanor. The District may report violations to the appropriate prosecuting agency and press for criminal prosecution pursuant to the California Penal Code.
- **Administrative penalties for unauthorized hydrant use:** When a fire hydrant or fire service is used for any purpose other than fire suppression — or when a fire hydrant meter or fire detector check is used without authorization — the District may charge administrative penalties.
- **Civil enforcement authority:** The District may pursue civil damages against individuals or companies that tamper with or divert water from hydrants and may seek injunctive relief in Superior Court. All remedies are cumulative and not exclusive.

SB 394 was authored by Sen. Ben Allen (D–Santa Monica) and co-sponsored by LVMWD and the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA). The bill was part of a package of bipartisan legislation to strengthen disaster response and recovery, a recognition of the critical link between water system integrity and public safety.

With the ordinance now codified, the financial responsibility for theft and damages rests squarely on violators instead of the communities and ratepayers served by LVMWD.

"We co-sponsored SB 394 because we knew the old penalties were simply not a deterrent," said LVMWD General Manager David Pedersen. "Now, with fines up to \$10,000 for repeat offenders and the full weight of civil and criminal enforcement behind us, we can protect every drop of water for the people who depend on it."

What This Means for Residents and Businesses

LVMWD wants all residents, contractors and commercial operators to be aware that unauthorized use of fire hydrants or any other form of water theft is now subject to active enforcement and encourages anyone who witnesses it to file a report at lvmwd.gov/water-theft.

Be sure to follow LVMWD on Facebook, X @lvmwd and Instagram @LasVirgenes_MWD for updates and more information on upcoming projects.

Las Virgenes Municipal Water District provides potable water, wastewater treatment, recycled water and biosolids composting to approximately 70,000 residents in the cities of Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, Westlake Village, and unincorporated areas of western Los Angeles County.

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