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# Metering May Not Be the Best Way to Conserve City's Water

To the Editor:

Before the New York City administration plods ahead with its residential water-metering proposals, more cost-effective - including voluntary - conservation measures can and should be implemented. Any new mandatory conservation measures, including metering, should be imposed by legislation, rather than by fiat of the city's water board.

It is too early to assert that universal metering will reduce city water-consumption levels more than other conservation measures; nothing suggests that water metering can be the panacea for the city's increasing demand for water. The city's Department of Environmental Protection (D.E.P.) has only begun an important demand study of the city's escalating water-consumption rates.

Conventional methods of water conservation, such as those practiced by the city during droughts and by water-deficient areas of the country, should be considered along with metering, if not before. Only during drought periods has the city implemented a per-capita water-consumption reduction program.

Since the drought restrictions were lifted last November, consumption has increased 100 million gallons per day. In addition to residential metering, the city is considering other expensive capital projects, including permanently drawing water from last year's emergency source - the inferior-quality water from the Hudson River - which would leave the city without a source of future emergency supply.

Such projects, whether to expand supply or curb demand, should take a back seat to enhancing existing conservation measures. The 10 percent reduction in consumption through residential metering, which is forecast by the city, can be attained by other, less costly means. Even if metering proves necessary and cost-effective at some point, homeowners should not personally bear the costs of installing meters in their homes. We are also concerned that landlords would seek, through existing rent laws, to pass along meter-installation costs to tenants.

City Comptroller Harrison J. Goldin, who has suggested further improvements in D.E.P.'s leak-protection and repair program to keep pace with reported leaks in the system, reported that as much as 140 million gallons per day - over 10 percent of daily supply - is lost. D.E.P. should more forcefully be seeking authority to enforce existing state water-saving plumbing-fixture laws. The city's plumbing code is insufficient to guide the proper installation and repair of water-saving plumbing.

New York City must adopt a water diet and commence a program to stabilize per-capita water consumption. Last year's response to the drought indicates the public's and business's willingness to save water. If the city would enthusiastically support a campaign to reduce water consumption, the people of this city would assure its success.

COREY B. BEARAK          AMY VICKERS  
Brooklyn, Nov. 3, 1986

The writers are, respectively, counsel and chief of staff to City Council Environmental Protection Committee Chairman Sheldon S. Leffler, and director of the City Council's Committee on Environmental Protection.