



Photo Courtesy Los Angeles Times

A friend from New York, recently transplanted to Los Angeles, has watched aghast as, again and again, weather reporters have greeted any local rainfall more than 1" with feverish STORMWATCH headlines. That said, the Southland got hit with quite a storm these last 48 hours.

"Well," say most Angelenos unaccustomed to precipitation. "At least we could use the rain." Except that we can't.

The vast majority of the city's rainfall picks up all kinds of pollutants from the street, and then gets merrily flushed out to sea. Even the part of it that gets treated goes to the ocean.

And that is truly obscene.

The wonderful organization [Tree People](#) has developed and popularized an [underground cistern that can preserve and purify rainwater](#). But now the city — and really cities all over the west — need to start actually putting them in. Which of course they haven't.

This isn't just about conserving water, although that of course is the major payoff: as Andy Lipkis, Tree People's founder has astutely commented, "When it rains an inch, Los Angeles hemorrhages 7.6 billion gallons of water." (Tree People's [five demonstration cisterns](#) can capture 1.25 million gallons of that, but that is, er, just a drop in the bucket). Remember also that pumping water consumes hundreds of megawatts: the state's largest electricity consumer is [the massive system of pumps](#) going over the Tehachapi Mountains. That's a lot of megawatts — and a lot of carbon emissions as well.

But of course we can't afford that. That would mean raising taxes, which is Always Bad.

So we'll just wind up spending more money buying water from other sources, and cooking the planet. Why we choose to pay this way and not through building cisterns is an exercise left for the reader.