

Statewide Water Crisis Campaign Launched

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SACRAMENTO – A coalition of water districts began a statewide television campaign Monday designed to persuade Californians that their water supply is in crisis.

The campaign by the Assn. of California Water Agencies, estimated to cost between \$7 million and \$9 million, will include radio and television commercials in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, San Diego, the Central Valley and other major media markets.

The group supports building more dams, and its campaign comes as the Legislature is in a special session to consider a wide-ranging water policy for the state. Officials with the association said the timing of the campaign is a coincidence.

“Educating the public about the crisis in our water system is a top priority for water agencies,” Timothy Quinn, executive director of the association, said in a statement.

Legislative leaders and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger are expected to meet over the next several weeks to discuss a potential multibillion-dollar water plan that could include new dams, canals and underground storage.

Low snowfall in the Sierra this year, thinner snowpacks predicted because of global warming and a federal judge’s order to drastically reduce water deliveries from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta have added urgency to the debate.

Schwarzenegger and Sen. President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland) have offered competing bond proposals that would fund dams in very different ways. Schwarzenegger wants to set aside money exclusively for two state dams, while Perata wants to give communities the option to build dams if they can find local funding.

The association’s 30-second commercial calls insufficient water storage one of the state’s problems. The campaign also is to include radio and newspaper ads, spokeswoman Jennifer Persike said.

The association represents nearly all the state’s water agencies, including the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California in Los Angeles and the San Diego County Water Authority.