California has a long history of contentious, often divisive water politics. In Southern California, questions pertaining to environmental equity usually revolve around the impacts of diverting water from other parts of the state (and larger region) to support agriculture and the needs of our ever-expanding metropolitan areas. Less well-known is that our unyielding thirst is becoming exacerbated by growing population, urbanization, pollution, and climate change. These pressures have led policy-makers and utilities to implement a variety of innovative measures in response, including demand side approaches (e.g., metering, variable rate structures, other economic incentives), mandatory conservation measures, and greater reliance on wastewater re-use and recycling to augment potable and non-potable uses. While these approaches are all technically feasible, each faces public acceptability challenges that revolve around issues of equity and fairness.

This talk examines these issues by focusing on the following questions: 1) How are certain groups disproportionately burdened and/or placed at risk (whether real or perceived) from adoption of these measures? 2) Are we doing all we can to ensure that the process by which decisions over adopting and implementing such measures is fair and equitable? And, 3) how can we ensure that inequities from adopting such measures are alleviated, mitigated, and/or compensated?