



Fact Sheet

Making Conservation a California Way of Life

What is *Making Conservation a California Way of Life*?

Making Conservation a California Way of Life is a new regulatory framework proposed by State Water Board staff that establishes individualized efficiency goals for each Urban Retail Water Supplier. These goals are based on the unique characteristics of the supplier's service area and give suppliers the flexibility to implement locally appropriate solutions. Once implemented, these goals are expected to reduce urban water use, helping California adapt to the water supply impacts brought on by climate change.

Why is the framework needed?

California has always experienced large swings between dry and wet weather, and due to climate change, these swings are becoming more severe. The recent storms and flooding seen statewide--following years of back-to-back extreme drought--make clear the importance of staying prepared. Hotter and drier periods that are increasing in frequency, reduced snowpack, and drier soils are making our water supplies more vulnerable. As part of the state's all-of-the-above strategy to expand storage, develop new water supplies, and promote more efficient water use, the proposed regulation seeks to cultivate long-term practices that help communities adapt to California's ongoing water challenges and lessen the need for the kinds of emergency water use reduction targets that were important in recent droughts.

Who is impacted by the framework?

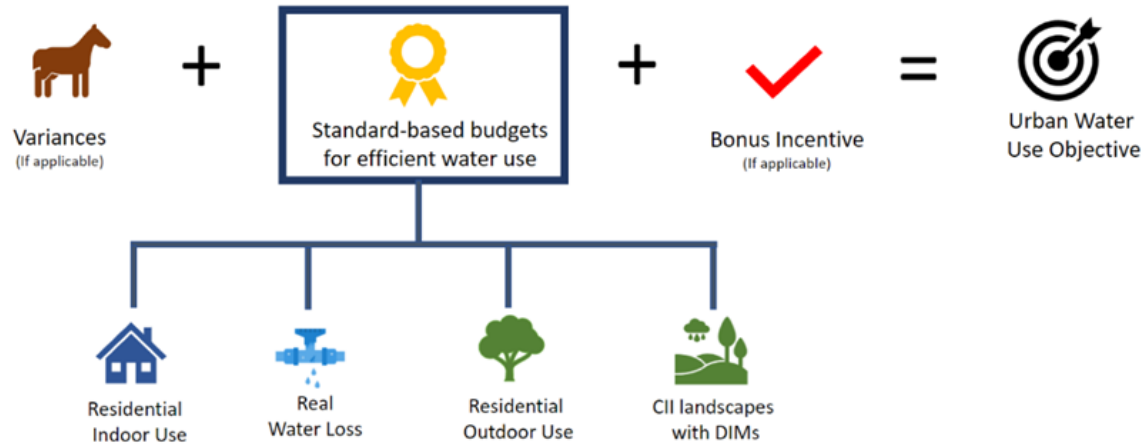
In 2018, the California State Legislature passed [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 1668](#) and [Senate Bill \(SB\) 606](#), directing the State Water Board to adopt efficiency standards and also performance measures for commercial, industrial, and institutional water use.

As part of the proposed regulation, *Urban Retail Water Suppliers – not individual households or businesses* – will be held to annual “urban water use objectives.” Urban Retail Water Suppliers are publicly and privately run agencies that deliver water to 95% of Californians. The regulation gives suppliers significant flexibility to meet objectives in a way that works best for them.

To meet annual objectives, suppliers may use a wide variety of tools to encourage customers to use water wisely, indoors and outdoors. Examples include education and outreach, leak detection, rate reform, incentives to plant “climate ready” landscapes, and rebates to replace old and inefficient fixtures and appliances.



How would objectives be calculated?



The proposed regulation would require suppliers to annually calculate their objective, which is the sum of efficiency budgets for a subset of urban water uses: residential indoor water use, residential outdoor water use, real water loss and commercial, industrial and institutional landscapes with dedicated irrigation meters. Each efficiency budget will be calculated using a statewide efficiency standard and local service area characteristics such as population, climate, and landscape area. Where relevant, suppliers may also include in their objective “variances” for unique uses, or a bonus incentive for potable recycled water use.

Suppliers would need to meet the overall objective, not each individual budget. The one exception is the budget for water loss, which was set by a [separate regulation](#).

What else would the framework do?

The proposed regulation would help realize the water savings outlined in California’s [Water Supply Strategy](#), released in 2022. The framework also is expected to result in suppliers making investments and programmatic changes that encourage individuals, businesses, and local governments to adapt how they use water. Such changes have the potential to advance the State Water Board’s mission of preserving, enhancing, and restoring the quality of water resources and the statutory directive to advance California’s climate change mitigation and adaptation goals. Specifically, the transition to climate-ready landscapes may:

- Bolster nature-based solutions.
 - Example: Increase the prevalence of native and pollinator-friendly plants.
- Create healthier soils and divert organic waste from landfills.
 - Example: Increase the use of compost and mulch.

- Advance equity.
 - Examples: Encourage suppliers to reevaluate rate structures and invest in partnerships that reduce urban heat.

What is the process and timeline for the State Water Board to consider adopting the framework?

Looking forward

A second public comment period will begin on March 12 and run through March 27, 2024. A Board workshop will be held on March 20th.

Looking Back

The regular rulemaking process for the proposed regulation to Make Conservation a California Way of Life began on August 18, 2023, and was followed by a public comment period and public hearing.

The standards for efficient residential indoor water use and water loss have already been set. The Legislature set the residential indoor standard in 2022 with the passage of Senate Bill 1157. The State Water Board adopted the water loss standard in early 2023.

Additional information

To learn more about the proposed regulation and upcoming opportunities to participate, visit: <https://waterboards.ca.gov/conservation/framework/>

(This fact sheet was last updated on March 12, 2024.)