



Frequently Asked Questions

Statewide Water Restrictions for All Californians

Water Conservation Emergency Regulations Frequently Asked Questions | Updated June 5, 2023

As climate change-induced extreme weather continues to disrupt California’s water system, two State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board or Board) adopted emergency regulations remain in effect, prohibiting certain wasteful water use practices statewide and encouraging water suppliers and all Californians to monitor water use more closely while building habits to use water wisely and make conservation a way of life. Local water suppliers may have adopted different and/or stricter water conservation measures than the State Water Board’s, so water customers should check with local agencies about their current restrictions.

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document updates previous FAQs. Please use the contents below to find information that may be most relevant to you.

You can download a Statewide Water Restrictions flyer to share with customers and HOA residents [here](#).

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All Californians

The questions below may be of interest to all Californians.

Where can I find information on the State Water Board's water conservation emergency regulations?

You can find updated documents and subscribe to the Water Conservation Regulations email list for announcements on the State Water Board's Water Conservation Emergency Regulations webpage at bit.ly/conservationreg

Should I follow state or local water use restrictions?

In most cases you should follow both. The State Water Board's restrictions that apply to all Californians include all the water use restrictions in the emergency regulation to prohibit wasteful water uses effective since January 2022 and the ban on watering decorative grass in commercial, industrial, and institutional areas (including common areas of homeowners' associations) effective since June 2022.

How is the Board advancing drought resilience and water conservation for the long-term?

Among other ongoing activities related to water rights and water quality, the Board is working on regulations to [Make Conservation a California Way of Life](#). The [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\) program](#) supports permanent and sustainable drinking water solutions that ensure all Californians have access to safe, affordable, and reliable drinking water. For information and updates on the Board's drought activities, visit the Board's [Drought website](#).

What is considered "potable" water?

For the emergency regulations, potable water is water from any drinking water system or any source used for drinking.

Do I need to empty my swimming pool because of drought?

The State Water Board's emergency regulations do not prohibit the filling, refilling, or use of swimming pools, however local water suppliers may have stricter water use rules than the State Water Board. Please contact your local water supplier for more information.

What is "turf"?

Turf means "a ground cover surface of mowed grass." This official definition of turf can be found in section 491 of title 23 of the California Code of Regulations.

What is "non-functional turf" or "decorative grass"?

Non-functional turf is a ground cover surface of mowed grass that is ornamental and not otherwise used for human recreation purposes. Non-functional turf does not include school fields, sports fields, and areas regularly used for civic or community events. To use more everyday language, this document intends for "decorative grass" to have the same meaning that non-functional turf does in the regulation.

Does the statewide ban on watering decorative grass apply to residential properties?

No, residential properties may continue to water decorative grass, however watering that causes more than incidental runoff remains prohibited. Also, local water suppliers may have stricter rules than the State Water Board, so check with your supplier. The Board encourages people to reduce watering decorative grass on their properties and to convert it to [water-wise](#) plants, but these are not required by the regulations. For more information and practical tips for converting your landscape and making your yard more climate-ready, visit [SaveOurWater.com](#).

What is “incidental runoff”?

“Incidental runoff” is an unintended, unanticipated, and infrequent amount of water that escapes the area where it was applied (for example, a sprinkler causing a small amount of water to unintentionally flow from a lawn onto the sidewalk). Runoff is not considered incidental if it is a result of excessive application, the facility or system design, intentional overflow, or negligence.

Do I have to follow a lawn watering schedule?

It depends on your local water use rules. Everyone should avoid overwatering lawns and everyone should wait 48 hours after it rains to water their lawns. However, lawn watering schedules are set by local water suppliers and cities. Please check with your local water supplier about your local schedule.

Should I skip watering when it rains?

Yes. If it rained recently or is going to rain soon, you should change your lawn watering schedule. Check the weather to plan for and confirm the amount of rainfall in your area.

Why does the emergency regulation prohibit watering during or within 48 hours of at least one fourth of an inch (1/4”) of rainfall specifically?

During the last drought, watering was prohibited after “measurable rainfall.” A number of comments suggested that the State Water Board use ¼ of an inch of rain to make the prohibition clearer. After this amount of rain, a sprinkler system can generally be turned off for at least 48 hours without harming most landscapes.

Are rebates available to replace grass?

For residents and businesses, rebates may be available from local water suppliers and cities.

Who enforces the water use prohibitions?

Any local agency or government authorized to enforce infractions can enforce these water use prohibitions at their discretion, along with the State Water Board. The emergency regulations allow agencies and governments to decide if and how to enforce these prohibitions along with their own existing water use rules.

What actions may a water supplier or local government (or any entity already authorized to enforce infractions) take to enforce violations of the regulations? What actions may the State Water Board take?

Local or State Water Board enforcement may include warning letters, conservation orders, and fines (up to \$500 per day). The State Water Board also encourages agencies to provide additional assistance to disadvantaged communities and translate conservation announcements and materials into the languages spoken in their service areas.

Where can I report water waste violations?

You can report water waste violations online at SaveWater.CA.Gov. These reports are sent to local water suppliers and the Board. The website allows you to upload photos, which helps with enforcement decision-making.

Can my HOA stop me from conserving water?

No. Homeowners may remove their lawns and replace them with water-wise plants. If you install water-efficient landscaping during the drought, your homeowners' association (HOA) cannot prevent you from maintaining it or require you to remove it when there is no longer a drought state of emergency. Additionally, your HOA cannot impose a fine or assessment for reducing or eliminating the watering of vegetation or lawns during a drought state of emergency, nor can it prohibit, or include conditions that have the effect of prohibiting, the use of low water-using plants as a group or as a replacement of existing grass. This enforcement may violate the Davis-Stirling Act. The State Water Board or a local agency could impose penalties on any HOA that violates specific portions of the Davis-Stirling Act. For more information and practical tips for making your yard more water-wise, visit SaveOurWater.com.

HOA, commercial, industrial & institutional property managers

Commercial, institutional, and industrial property managers, workers, and residents are required to comply with all prohibitions discussed in the questions above. Below is more information that is relevant specifically to commercial, institutional, and industrial areas, including areas managed by homeowners' associations (HOAs).

What parts of the Davis-Stirling Act apply to HOAs during a drought emergency?

According to the Davis-Stirling Act, an HOA may not impose a fine for reducing watering of lawns or vegetation during a drought emergency that was either declared by the Governor or local government. Additionally, homeowners may remove their lawns and replace them with water-wise plants. If a homeowner installs water-efficient landscaping during the drought, an HOA cannot prevent them from maintaining it or require them to remove it when there is no longer a drought state of emergency. An HOA also cannot prohibit, or include conditions that have the effect of prohibiting, the use of low water-using plants as a group or as a replacement

of existing grass. You can find the relevant text here: <https://www.davis-stirling.com/HOME/Statutes/Civil-Code-4735>.

Does the ban on watering decorative grass apply to HOAs?

Yes, the ban on using potable water to water decorative grass applies to some HOA landscapes, but only to decorative grass on property the HOA owns or maintains and not at individual residences (or separate interests). While an individual's property is considered residential, property owned or maintained by an HOA is treated the same as other landscapes owned by commercial or institutional entities. The regulation does not ban watering decorative grass with recycled water, watering grass regularly used for recreation or community activities, or watering trees or other non-grass plants.

In an HOA, who decides if grass is decorative?

An HOA should review areas of grass that it maintains, consult with residents, and determine whether the grass is decorative. Water suppliers may defer to HOAs' determinations that specific areas of grass are used for recreation or community events. However, water suppliers also retain the authority to enforce the watering ban if there is a documented violation.

Are apartment buildings considered part of the commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors?

Most apartment buildings are part of the residential sector and therefore not subject to the ban on watering decorative grass. However, apartment buildings may also include commercial facilities, such as ground floor businesses or other commercial operations on site, in the same manner as HOAs. Apartment building owners and managers should check with their water supplier to see whether their building or complex may be considered, in part, commercial, industrial, or institutional and would therefore have some landscaped areas subject to the same rules (and exclusions) as similarly situated landscaped areas in HOAs.

May property managers use recycled water or greywater to water decorative grass?

Yes, however the Board encourages people to prioritize watering trees and other plants due to the drought and the amount of water required for grass. Also, check with your local water supplier if they have stricter water use rules than the State Water Board.

Do the regulations affect trees? Do urban trees need to be watered?

The regulations do not restrict watering trees. The Board urges people to continue to water trees, even while reducing or stopping the watering of grass. Newly planted trees usually need to be watered more frequently than mature trees, including hand watering. Trees near or on decorative grass can still be watered even when individual sprinkler heads or zones that water only decorative grass must be turned off or capped. For more information about tree species and water needs, visit the [Save Our Trees section](#) within SaveOurWater.com.

Are there any exceptions to the ban on watering decorative grass?

The ban only applies to watering decorative grass in commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors and only applies to watering with potable water. It does not apply to residential grass or any grass that is regularly used for human recreational purposes, such as community spaces, or

sports fields and other grass regularly used for recreation or events. The regulation does not ban watering trees or other non-grass plantings. There also is an exemption process available for certain low water using grass species and watering approaches. To be exempt from the ban, an owner or manager must provide to their water supplier evidence that they have met two requirements: (1) the user must certify that the grass species needs low levels of water (a plant factor of 0.3 or less) and (2) the user must demonstrate that the grass is watered in a way that uses low levels of water (less than 40 percent of reference evapotranspiration). For more information on plant factors and reference evapotranspiration, see the State's [Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance](#).

Is grass at cemeteries, parks, and golf courses considered decorative grass?

It depends. In general, grass on cemetery property is not wholly exempt from the ban on watering decorative grass. Cemetery operators may continue watering areas that are regularly used for community functions such as visitation and services. Watering areas that are not regularly used (e.g., fringe areas or historical areas that are no longer visited) should cease, unless using recycled water. These similarly apply to parks and golf courses.

Does the ban on watering decorative grass apply to watering with well water?

It depends. The ban on watering decorative grass only applies to watering with potable water. Well water that needs treatment to meet drinking water quality standards would be considered non-potable before that treatment. Well water that is used for drinking water purposes without treatment, on the other hand, would be covered by the ban.

Is watering grass that is required for effective measurements at California Irrigation Management Information System (CIMIS) stations prohibited?

No. CIMIS stations require well-irrigated and well-maintained cool season grass as a reference surface to produce accurate estimates of reference evapotranspiration (ET_0). Data from CIMIS stations are being used by over 60,000 primary registered users and thousands more secondary users for urban and agricultural irrigation scheduling purposes, and many other applications. Therefore, grass at CIMIS stations is not considered decorative.

Who will enforce the decorative grass watering ban?

Water suppliers and local governments are expected to communicate the ban on watering decorative grass to their commercial, industrial, and institutional customers. The emergency regulation makes violations of the ban an infraction; any entity that is already authorized to enforce infractions, such as a water supplier or local government, may choose to enforce violations of the regulation. In addition, anyone may report water waste, including watering decorative grass on a commercial, industrial, or institutional property, to the Board at [SaveWater.CA.Gov](#). The Board may use its enforcement authority to respond to violations of the regulation.

What is covered by the “construction site preparation” prohibition?

The prohibition on using potable water does not apply to all uses of water for construction activities, specifically it does not apply to “construction site preparation” when “no other method can be used or as needed to protect the health and safety of the public.” Examples of these exclusions, for which the use of potable water is not prohibited, include activities such as mold removal when potable water must be used; and mixing of concrete or other solutions where adherence to manufacturers' requirements necessitate use of potable water; or where contamination from non-potable water would be detrimental to the structure, material, equipment, and clean up.

Water suppliers

Water suppliers should follow and communicate to their customers the requirements above. Below is information that is relevant to water suppliers specifically.

What should small water suppliers (under 3,000 connections) do?

The State Water Board encourages all water suppliers to continue doing all that they can for water conservation across California. Current statewide emergency water restrictions apply to all Californians regardless of whether they are served by an urban water supplier. However, all water suppliers may adopt more stringent conservation measures and are encouraged to develop their own progressive enforcement practices to promote conservation.

Are water suppliers still required to implement Level 2 demand reduction actions?

No. There is no longer a statewide emergency requirement for urban water suppliers to implement the Level 2 demand reduction actions of their own Water Shortage Contingency Plans, however water suppliers may adopt more stringent conservation measures locally.