



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 refers to legislation about how we use water and a new way of managing urban water use. To implement it, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) will consider a regulatory framework that establishes unique efficiency goals for the over 400 Urban Retail Water Suppliers in California and provides them with flexibility to implement locally appropriate solutions. The proposed regulation seeks to protect California's access to clean and affordable water by pivoting from short-term restrictions prompted by emergency drought conditions, to long-term practices that help communities adapt to the state's ongoing water challenges.

Why is the framework needed?

California is experiencing large swings between drought and flood, and due to climate change, these swings are becoming more severe. The recent storms and flooding seen statewide are proof of this shift and emphasize the importance of staying prepared. So do the back-to-back droughts of the last decade; hotter and drier periods are increasing in frequency and severity, reducing snowpack, drying soils, and making our water supplies more vulnerable. Making conservation a way of life is a critical part of responding to these challenges and improving the state's water future. Landscape transformation, for example, can help California communities adapt to climate whiplash. More efficiently irrigated gardens planted with lower water-using and deeply rooted trees and shrubs both use less water and help "slow the flow" of water into flooded streets during storm events.

What will the framework do?

In 2018, the California State Legislature passed [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 1668 and Senate Bill \(SB\) 606](#), directing the State Water Board to adopt standards for using water more efficiently, as well as 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 "urban water use objectives." Urban Retail Water Suppliers are publicly and privately run agencies that deliver water to 95% of Californians. The regulation will provide them with significant flexibility to meet objectives in a way that works best for them.

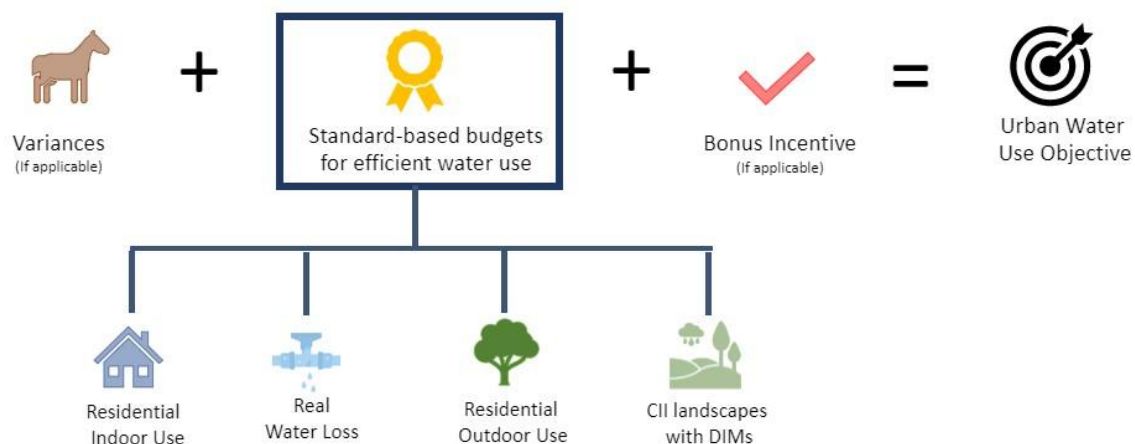
To meet objectives, suppliers may use a wide variety of tactics to equip their customers with information and resources to help them use water wisely, indoors and outdoors.



Examples include education and outreach, leak detection, incentives to plant “climate ready” landscapes, and rebates to replace old and inefficient fixtures and appliances.

How will objectives be calculated?

The framework includes efficiency standards for different types of water use: residential indoor use, residential outdoor use, real water loss, and commercial, industrial and institutional (CII) landscapes with dedicated irrigation meters. For each of these types of water use, suppliers would use a formula to calculate a water budget for the supplier’s entire service area, not for individual customers. The formulas include the standard itself and relevant characteristics of the supplier’s service area, such as population. After calculating the budget for each use, suppliers would add up the budgets to determine their urban water use objective. Where relevant, suppliers may also include “variances” for unique uses or a bonus incentive for potable recycled water use in their calculation. 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](#).



Beyond saving water, what else does the framework do?

In addition to saving water, the Making Conservation a California Way of Life framework can advance other critical goals such as:

- prioritizing water for trees to improve human health by keeping our neighborhoods shaded and cool;
- creating pollinator habitat in home gardens to support native ecosystems as well as the production of many of California’s specialty crops; and
- incentivizing suppliers to invest in water use efficiency, the cheapest source of new water supplies, to help keep water affordable for Californians.

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

Looking forward

State Water Board staff are still developing the proposed regulation to implement the Making Conservation a California Way of Life framework. There will be multiple opportunities for the public to provide input before the Board considers adopting it.

The formal rulemaking process is expected to begin by May 2023. Once the rulemaking process has officially started, the State Water Board has one year to complete the process.

Looking Back

The State Legislature set the residential indoor standard in 2022 with the passage of Senate Bill (SB)1157, and 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: bit.ly/swrcb_conservation_framework

(This Fact Sheet was last updated on March 20, 2023.)