

State Water Resources Control Board Posts 36-Month Urban Water Supply Stress Test Submissions

On May 18, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted a statewide water conservation approach that allows urban water suppliers to replace their prior state-assigned percentage target reduction with a localized “stress test” approach based on a showing of whether they have at least a three-year water supply under extended drought conditions.

The revised emergency regulation followed significantly improved water supply conditions in most of the state and recognition that urban water suppliers are now better positioned to respond to drought impacts following their experiences conserving upwards of 24 percent of their water use over the past 13 months than they were in mid-2015.

The revised regulation requires individual urban water suppliers to self-certify the level of available water supplies they have assuming three additional dry years. Wholesale water agencies were also required to include documentation about how regional supplies would fare under three additional dry years. Both urban water suppliers and wholesale suppliers are required to report the underlying basis for their assertions, and urban water suppliers are required to continue reporting their conservation levels. The State Water Board has not independently verified the information, but reserves the ability to reject certifications later found to be erroneous.

Several Benefits to Three Year “Stress Test” Effort

The purpose of the three-year “stress test” was to acknowledge both the level of water supplies available to different areas, through improved hydrology and/or significant investments in new supplies, e.g., recycled water, groundwater banking, local surface and groundwater storage, desalination, stormwater capture, or other methods. By choosing a three-year conservative planning horizon, the state could step back this year from its unprecedented specific target setting.

Water suppliers that would experience shortage conditions in 2019 under the three-dry-years assumptions must meet a state-imposed conservation standard equal to the shortage level. For example, a supplier with a 12 percent shortage will now have a 12 percent conservation standard. Water suppliers whose submittals show no shortage conditions are limited to their 2013 water use and are encouraged to conserve more.

Submitting a self-certification was optional. Water suppliers that did not submit self-certifications will retain their conservation standard from March 2016, which 32 decided to accept. Others, even if they meet the “stress test,” are expected to and have retained either a percentage or other requirement-based conservation program. The State Water Board will continue to monitor and require reporting of water use and conservation results monthly throughout the year.

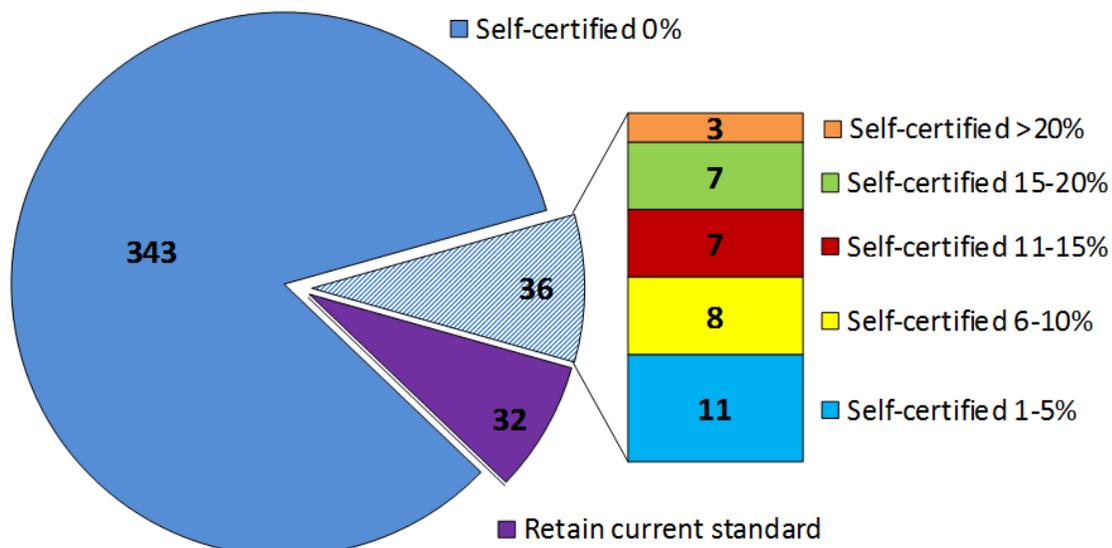
All state-imposed conservation standards will be in place through January 2017, at which point the State Water Board will evaluate water supply conditions and the level of conservation savings and determine whether additional emergency conservation regulations are necessary. Executive Order B-37-16 directs the State Water Board to be prepared to reestablish mandatory conservation levels if conditions warrant.

Hundreds of Submitted, Individual Self Certified Tests Reviewed

State Water Board staff reviewed the self-certification submittals to ensure they were complete, well-documented, and clear. Since the June 22 submission deadline, staff has worked to follow up with suppliers whose self-certifications were inadequate.

Nearly all of the water suppliers that were contacted about an inadequate self-certification furnished additional information. However, nine suppliers' submissions are still inadequate, and these suppliers were issued Informational Orders on August 16, 2016. Those suppliers will have to provide the identified additional information to the State Water Board. Suppliers that do not provide complete self-certifications may have them rejected, and be returned to their March 2016 conservation standard. If a supplier does not respond to an Information Order within 30 days, the supplier may also face monetary penalties.

The majority of suppliers projected sufficient potable water supply under three additional years of drought and passed the "stress test", meaning zero percent state-mandated conservation standard compared to 2013. Thirty-six suppliers identified new conservation standards based on supply shortfall from "stress test" results. Thirty-two urban water suppliers did not submit "stress test" and retain March 2016 conservation standard. The figure below shows the results of the self-certifications and status of conservation standards.



*The above results include one supplier new to reporting that also submitted "stress test" information, bringing the total number of urban water suppliers to 411.

More than 4.2 million Californians are served by the 68 urban water suppliers that will have a state-mandated conservation standard, either based on the “stress test” results or because suppliers opted to keep their existing conservation standard.

Despite the conservation standard of zero percent, the majority of water suppliers reported [water savings in June 2016](#) compared to June 2013. In the Bay Area, Contra Costa Water District, Dublin San Ramon Services District, and Alameda County Water District are among 17 water suppliers that passed their “stress test” and reported water conservation above 25 percent in June 2016. Additionally, several agencies opted to maintain voluntary conservation standards above the requirements based on the “stress test” results.

The regulation keeps in place the monthly reporting requirements and specific prohibitions against certain water uses. Those prohibitions include watering down a sidewalk with a hose instead of using a broom or a brush, or overwatering a landscape to where water is running off the lawn, over a sidewalk and into the gutter. Prohibitions directed to the hospitality industry also remain in place. Prohibitions against homeowners associations taking action against homeowners during a declared drought remain as well. As directed by Governor Brown’s [Executive Order B-37-16](#), the Board will separately take action to make some of these requirements and prohibitions permanent.

The adopted regulation is the result of review of many meetings, written and oral comments from a public workshop on [April 20](#) to receive input on conservation needs through the summer and fall, and lessons learned since the Water Board first adopted drought emergency water conservation regulations.

Governor and Board Actions Achieved Historic Conservation Statewide

In his April 1, 2015 [Executive Order](#), Governor Brown mandated a 25 percent water use reduction by users of urban water supplies across California.

In May 2015, the State Water Board adopted an emergency regulation requiring a cumulative 25 percent reduction in overall potable urban water use over the following 9 months. The [May 2015 Emergency Regulation](#) used a sliding scale for setting conservation standards, so that communities that have already reduced their residential gallons per capita per day (R-GPCD) through past conservation had lower mandates than those that had not made such gains since the last major drought. Conservation tiers for urban water suppliers were set between eight percent and 36 percent, based on residential per capita water use for the months of July - September 2014.

During this time, statewide water conservation was [unprecedented](#). In those 10 months alone, the state realized nearly a 24 percent savings in water use as compared to same months in 2013, resulting in some 1.30 million acre-feet of water conserved throughout California, enough to supply 6.5 million people with water for an entire year.

On Feb. 2, 2016, based on Governor Brown's [November 2015 Executive Order](#), the State Water Board approved an updated and extended emergency regulation that continued mandatory reductions through October.

The [February 2016 Emergency Regulation](#) responded to calls for continuing the conservation structure that has spurred such dramatic savings, while providing greater consideration of some localized factors that influence water needs around the state: climate differences, population growth and significant investments in new local, drought-resilient water supplies such as potable wastewater reuse and desalination. The February Emergency Regulation was superseded by the Board's May 18 emergency regulation. Under the new reporting structure adopted by the Board May 18, water districts will continue to [report water use](#), but had the option of identifying a new conservation standard based on any shortfall in projected supply over three drought years.

The State Water Board's May 18 emergency regulation responded in part to Governor Brown's May 9, 2016 [Executive Order](#) directing actions aimed at using water wisely, reducing water waste, and improving water use efficiency for the years and decades ahead. The Executive Order, in part, directed the State Water Board to extend the emergency regulations for urban water conservation through the end of January 2017. As called for in his Executive Order, it is anticipated the State Water Board will be working closely with the Department of Water Resources and other agencies to define and establish water efficiency standards for the state to ensure a more reliable water supply and to make state water users more resilient and prepared over the long-term.

(This fact sheet was last updated August 15, 2016)