



Media Release

State Water Board readopts decorative grass watering ban on business and government properties

Conserving and storing water remains critical for communities recovering from multi-year drought conditions, preparing against climate change

May 31, 2023

Contact: [Edward Ortiz](#), Information Officer

SACRAMENTO – The State Water Resources Control Board has readopted an [emergency regulation](#) that bans using drinking water for watering decorative grass (also referred to as non-functional turf) in commercial, industrial and institutional areas throughout the state.

The State Water Board’s readoption of this regulation signals the real need for Californians to continue using water wisely, and it aligns with Gov. Gavin Newsom’s March 2023 executive order affirming that the multi-year drought continues to have significant, immediate impacts on communities with vulnerable water supplies across California. Although conditions have improved, they have not abated severe drought conditions that remain in some parts of the state, including those with groundwater basins that are depleted.

The regulation bans watering non-functional turf, which generally is mowed grass that is not used for recreational or other community activities, at commercial, industrial and institutional properties. This applies to areas like grass in front of or next to large commercial buildings, and some common areas managed by homeowners’ associations. In addition to not applying to grass used for recreational or other community activities, the ban does not affect or prohibit watering residential lawns or trees. In fact, the state encourages people to keep watering trees because of their many environmental benefits. The ban also does not prohibit using recycled water for irrigating non-functional turf.

“We all have a shared responsibility to continue to limit non-essential outdoor water use while the state grapples with extreme weather and plans for possible dry conditions this summer and into the next wet season,” said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. “This readopted regulation will help us continue to protect California’s water resources in hotter, drier conditions.”

The regulation was initially adopted by the board in May 2022 and went into effect in June 2022. Once approved by the Office of Administrative Law and filed with the



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Secretary of State, the extension of the ban will go into effect for one additional year. It would have expired in June 2023, if not readopted.

With this readoption, there are two State Water Board water conservation emergency regulations in place. The other is an emergency regulation prohibiting wasteful water uses. That regulation, readopted in December 2022 and still in effect, prohibits outdoor watering causing substantial water to run onto sidewalks and other areas, and the use of potable water for washing hard surfaces like driveways or sidewalks. Violations of these prohibitions or of the newly extended non-functional turf watering ban are considered infractions.

Agencies already authorized to enforce the existing water regulations, like water suppliers and local governments, still are empowered to address violations of the non-functional turf watering regulation. In some areas, similar prohibitions are required by local plans or ordinances.

For more information on this and other statewide water restrictions, go to the [State Water Board's Water Conservation Emergency Regulation page](#).

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The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.



Media Release

New statewide emergency water conservation regulation now in effect

June 14, 2022

Contact: Edward Ortiz, [Public Information Officer](#)

SACRAMENTO – A new statewide [emergency water conservation regulation](#) that bans using potable (drinkable) water on decorative or non-functional grass at commercial, industrial, and institutional properties went into effect Friday. It also requires urban water suppliers to implement all demand-reduction actions under Level 2 of their Water Shortage Contingency Plans.

The State Water Board adopted the regulation at its May 24 board meeting, and the Office of Administrative Law gave it final approval on June 10. The new restrictions are in response to Governor Newsom's March 28 Executive Order calling for water conservation directives to address California's new normal of climate extremes.

The regulation's ban on watering non-functional turf (turf is defined as mowed grass) at commercial, industrial and institutional properties includes areas like the grass in front of or next to large commercial buildings and common areas managed by homeowners' associations. The ban does not include watering grass used for human recreation or other community activities, watering residential grass or watering trees. The ban also does not prohibit the use of recycled water for irrigating non-functional turf.

"With increased aridification as our new reality, there is an urgency to all of us understanding and acting to ensure that water conservation is a California way of life. These regulations are part of our shared responsibility to address non-essential outdoor water use as our communities experience record-breaking drought and plan for dry conditions into next year," said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board.

There also are new options for addressing water waste. In addition to the State Water Board, agencies that are already authorized to enforce infractions, like water suppliers and local government, are empowered to address violations of this regulation. A violation of the non-functional turf irrigation provision, for example, would be an infraction and subject to a fine of up to \$500. This is the second State Water Board water conservation emergency regulation of 2022; the prohibitions of the [first emergency regulation](#), adopted in January, also are infractions and are still in effect.



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The regulation also requires urban water suppliers to implement all demand-reduction actions under Level 2 of their Water Shortage Contingency Plans, which are actions meant to address a 10% to 20% water shortage. In addition, urban water suppliers are required to fast-track their submissions of supply and demand assessments to plan for potential extended dry conditions.

“Level 2” actions vary for each water supplier, but they often include things such as:

- Increasing communication about the importance of water conservation
- Limiting outdoor irrigation to certain days or hours
- Increasing patrolling to identify water waste
- Enforcing water-use prohibitions

Some water suppliers already have imposed strong new restrictions on customers’ water use in accordance with their drought management plans; property managers should check with their local suppliers for details. However, about half of the state’s 436 water suppliers have not yet activated Level 2, and 36 have not submitted drought plans.

The emergency regulation requires suppliers without drought plans to take certain conservation actions, such as conducting outreach to customers about conservation, restricting outdoor irrigation to two days a week and enforcing against wasteful water practices.

Water suppliers are expected to communicate the requirements of the emergency regulation to their customers. The State Water Board encourages agencies to provide additional assistance to disadvantaged communities and translate conservation announcements and materials into the languages spoken in their service areas. People who see water waste should report it at [savewater.ca.gov](https://www.savewater.ca.gov) or to their local water supplier, city or county. Frequently Asked Questions and more information on the State Water Board’s water conservation emergency regulations can be found at <https://bit.ly/conservationreg>.

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