



Fact Sheet

Prohibitions, Monthly Reporting, and Stress Tests Continue with Extended Water Conservation Regulations

In May of 2015, the State Water Board adopted a water conservation regulation in response to historic drought conditions and the Governor's April 1, 2015, [Executive Order](#). Under that regulation, the State Water Board set specific conservation targets for large urban water suppliers, required reporting of water production information, prohibited wasteful water practices, and gave urban water agencies additional enforcement authority to prevent those practices.

The regulations were adjusted in February of 2016 to further recognize regional differences and investments in new drinking water supplies. The public responded by the end of the 2016 rainy season and reduced water use by almost 25 percent through April 2016 as compared to 2013.

In May 2016, following the end of the rainy season and the Governor's direction to adjust the standards in light of improved conditions for many water agencies, the State Water Resources Control Board revised its statewide drought emergency water conservation approach. The new regulation replaced the Board's prior percentage reduction-based water conservation standards with a localized "stress test" approach.

The "Stress test" approach allowed urban water suppliers to establish local conservation standards, commensurate with need, by demonstrating water availability should the drought continue an additional three years.

In June 2016, many urban water suppliers submitted documentation that they would have sufficient potable water supply under an assumed three additional years of drought, passing the "stress test" and eliminating the need for state-mandated conservation. Other suppliers identified needed conservation standards based on anticipated supplier-specific supply shortfalls, or simply retained their [existing](#) conservation standard. Statewide conservation levels have remained high since the State Board adopted the stress test approach, with some easing in light of improved conditions.

State Water Board Extends the Regulation

On Feb. 8, the State Water Board re-adopted and extended the regulation, but agreed to consider repeal of the regulation in May if the regulations have not been rescinded or modified by May 1, following a more thorough review of the state's water supply conditions. In effect, the Board's action continues the stress test approach, existing water use reporting requirements, and sensible prohibitions on wasteful water use practices that have been in place since 2015. The current regulation does not require mandatory conservation unless water suppliers determine that they have a shortfall.



The extended regulation keeps in place the existing rules, including specific prohibitions against designated wasteful water use practices. Those prohibitions include outdoor watering during a rain event or 48 hours after; 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 onto the sidewalk or into the gutter.

In addition, the regulation continues the existing required monthly reporting of water use, consistent with the Governor's [January 2014 Executive Order](#) declaring a drought and [May 2016 Executive Order](#) geared towards "making water conservation a California way of life."

Prohibitions against [home owners associations](#) (HOAs) penalizing homeowners for certain outdoor conservation practices during a declared drought remain as well. Similar requirements are also extended to cities and counties, reflecting existing law that prevents local governments from fining residents for not watering the lawn during a declared drought.

Improved Water Supply Conditions and Consistent Conservation – Reason for Staying the Course

Winter 2017 saw dramatically improved hydrologic conditions in many parts of California. Concerns over urban water supply reliability have eased significantly compared to last year throughout California. However, groundwater basins in some areas of the state remain depleted due to prolonged drought. Likewise, pockets of the state, such as the Tulare Basin and along the central coast, are still experiencing water supply shortfalls.

Due to improved conditions, the Board is not proposing to tighten the standards, which the Governor had directed the Board to be prepared for depending upon water supply conditions and conservation levels. The regulation keeps the existing regulations in place in recognition of uncertain conditions through the end of the water year. For suppliers who have self-certified that they have no supply shortfall, the regulations will not require a specific conservation target, but does require continuing monthly reporting and maintaining important prohibitions on wasteful water use practices and giving local agencies enforcement authority.

The Board in May 2016 transitioned from its unprecedented mandatory state-set conservation standards to conservation standards based on supply reliability considerations at the local level. For a majority of the state these standards currently require only that water use not increase above 2013 levels, though some suppliers have retained higher voluntary conservation levels and Californians have continued to respond with stellar conservation even as conditions have improved dramatically. At this point in the water year, continuing with locally-appropriate conservation, including eliminating certain wasteful water use practices, is still prudent in case the formidable snowpack so far this year were to melt due to late season warm precipitation.

Governor, Board, Save Our Water, and Local Agency 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. The Water production reports submitted to the State Water Board show that customers in the majority of urban water suppliers have successfully responded to conservation expectations over the last 30 months. From June 2015 through June 2016, Californian's conserved water just under the mandated goal, with a cumulative average savings of 24.2 percent. Californians have continued to conserve at high levels under the less prescriptive stress-test standards, with cumulative savings during the seven months that the stress-test standards have been in effect reaching 19.5 percent relative to the 2013 baseline. Since June 2013, 2.43 million acre-feet of water have been saved – enough to supply more than 12 million people, close to a third of the state's population for a year. For more information, see the fact sheet found [here](#).

In May, Gov. Brown issued an [executive order](#) calling for new permanent water-use efficiency targets for each urban water suppliers that reflect California's diverse climate, landscape and demographic conditions. The Board is now working with other agency partners (Department of Water Resources, California Department of Food and Agriculture, the California Public Utilities Commission, and the California Energy Commission to implement the executive order and better prepare the state to adapt to the water supply effects of climate change and population growth while maintaining a prosperous economy. These actions will help achieve a top priority of the California Water Action Plan - to improve long-term drought preparedness and "Make Conservation a California Way of Life."

On Nov. 30, the State Water Board, along with the four other state agencies, released a [draft framework](#) for implementing the executive order. The new plan's fundamental premise is that efficient water use helps all of California better prepare for longer and more severe droughts caused by climate change. The framework develops long-term water conservation measures that will help ensure all communities have sufficient water supplies. This will involve activities such as permanently prohibiting wasteful practices, such as hosing off sidewalks and driveways and ensuring farmers plan and prepare for severe drought. A final report with recommendations will be released in early 2017.

Background

California has been dealing with the effects of an unprecedented drought. To learn about all the actions the state has taken to manage our water system and cope with the impacts of the drought, visit [Drought.CA.Gov](#). Every Californian should take steps to conserve water. Find out how at [SaveOurWater.com](#). While saving water, it is important to properly water trees. Find out how at [www.saveourwater.com/trees](#). In addition to many effective local programs, state-funded turf removal and toilet replacement rebates are also available. Information and rebate applications can be found at: [www.saveourwaterrebates.com/](#)

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