



Fact Sheet

36 Month Urban Water Supply Now Basis For Local Emergency Water Conservation Efforts

On May 18, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted a statewide water conservation approach that replaces the prior percentage reduction-based water conservation standard with a localized “stress test” approach – that mandates urban water suppliers act now to ensure at least a three year supply of water to their customers under drought conditions.

The adopted emergency regulation followed improved water supply conditions around most of the state and recognition that urban water suppliers are in a better position to plan for, and accommodate, local drought impacts to their water supply, following their experiences conserving upwards of 24 percent of their water use these past 10 months.

The adopted regulation establishes standards with locally developed conservation standards based upon each agency’s specific circumstances. The regulation now requires individual urban water suppliers to self-certify the level of available water supplies they have assuming three additional dry years, and the level of conservation necessary to assure adequate supply over that time.

This self-certification would include information provided by regional water distribution agencies (wholesale suppliers) about how regional supplies would fare during 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.

Urban water suppliers are now required to reduce potable water use in a percentage equal to their projected shortfall in the event of three more dry years. In other words, if an individual water district projects it would, under the specified assumptions, have a 10 percent shortfall after the next three years at the current rate of use, their mandatory conservation standard would be 10 percent.

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 home owners 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.

The new conservation standards will take effect in June and remain in effect until the end of January 2017.

Improved Water Supply and Conditions; and Conservation – Reason for Change

Winter 2016 saw improved hydrologic conditions in parts of California. More rain and snow fell in Northern California as compared to Central and Southern California; yet, due to California's water storage and conveyance systems, concerns over supply reliability have eased compared to last year throughout urban California. Consequently, the unprecedented mandatory state-driven conservation standards in place over the last ten months must transition to conservation standards based on supply reliability considerations at the local level. However, conservation standards are still needed in case this winter was a short reprieve in a longer drought.

The Board has been monitoring state hydrology, water supply conditions, including local supply reliability, and the conservation levels achieved by the State's 411 urban water suppliers. Hydrologic conditions in parts of California – particularly northern California – have markedly improved relative to 2014 and 2015. Many reservoirs are above historic averages for late spring, and water allocations are up in most cases for the State Water Project.

In addition, the water production reports submitted to the State Water Board have shown that the majority of urban water suppliers have successfully responded to mandatory conservation expectations over the last 20 months. Public awareness of drought conditions and the public's extraordinary response this past ten months should lead to continuing conservation.

Should severe drought conditions return, the Board stands ready to return to stronger conservation mandates to ensure urban water suppliers can meet local water needs in the long term.

The adopted drought emergency water conservation regulation allows suppliers to define an individualized conservation standard on their specific water supply and demand conditions. Each water supplier is required to evaluate its supply portfolio and self-certify the accuracy of its information while also providing the underlying information and assumptions; the State Water Board would assign each supplier a mandatory conservation standard equal to the percentage deficiency the supplier identifies in its supply under specified assumptions. Additionally, certain statewide requirements on small suppliers and businesses would be lifted.

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 the last 10 months alone, the state realized nearly a 24 percent savings in water use as compared to same period 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 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 is longer in effect. Under the new reporting structure adopted by the Board May 18, water districts will continue to [report water use](#), but their conservation standard will be based on any shortfall in projected supply over three drought years.

On May 9, Governor Brown [issued an 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 May 18, 2016)