

Things to know about new water rules in California drought

May 6 2015, by Fenit Nirappil



In this July 9, 2014, file photo, a house is reflected in a puddle of water from an irrigated front yard in San Diego. Californians conserved little water in March and local officials were not aggressive in cracking down on waste, state regulators reported Tuesday, May 5, 2015 as they considered tough measures to force savings amid a continuing drought. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull, File)

Brown lawns, dusty cars and idle sprinklers loom this summer under Gov. Jerry Brown's mandate to reduce urban water use by 25 percent to

get through the drought. The State Water Resources Control Board approved new restrictions Tuesday that include a mandatory target for each local water agency to reduce consumption.

Here are some things to know about this plan:

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Why is the state doing this?

California is far from running out of [water](#), but it's not clear when the drought is going to end. Regulators say saving [urban water](#) is the cheapest and most efficient way make sure [communities](#) have enough water if the drought persists and to avert more drastic cuts later.

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Who does it affect?

It's up to the state's hundreds of local water agencies to enforce the rules to meet the local targets. Water experts say that letting lawns go brown is the single most important step that can be taken, but state regulators also want [water conservation](#) to be top of mind when people are doing laundry or taking showers.

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How will California reach 25 percent conservation?

Each community has a [water reduction](#) mandate of between 8 percent and 36 percent, depending on past use. The state believes it's easier for water-guzzling cities and desert resorts to make huge cuts by neglecting big lawns. Water-frugal communities with few lawns such as San

Francisco are less able to conserve even more.

Is everyone on board?

Dozens of cities have blasted the water reduction targets as unfair and unrealistic. The plan also has highlighted regional tensions. Diverse regions of the state, from wealthy beach towns to rural Central Valley communities, are jockeying for limited water. Some agencies that have conserved for years complain that they are lumped in with cities that just started metering water use. Others say they are being punished with large cuts even after preparing for the drought by building local storage supplies and water-saving technology.

What if communities don't meet their targets?

Communities with pitiful savings face hefty fines, although the water board says that's a last resort. The board says it will focus on helping communities find ways to drive down use. The state does have the power to intervene, including compelling new restrictions and raising local water rates, but has never done so. Gov. Jerry Brown wants to give local agencies the authority to issue fines up to \$10,000, but more than half of communities that reported their enforcement efforts have not issued any fines at all.

What's next?

The board says it expects to see large cuts immediately. The approaching

summer season is the peak time for water use and the best opportunity to save by letting lawns go thirsty. Communities will report their water use monthly, and regulators say they'll investigate agencies that lag in conservation.

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