

Water restrictions lifted for 7 million in Southern California, but region still urged to conserve

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Mandatory water restrictions are being lifted for nearly 7 million people across Southern California following winter storms that have boosted

reservoirs and eased a severe shortage that emerged during the state's driest three-year period on record.

The board of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California decided to end the emergency conservation mandate for agencies in portions of Los Angeles, Ventura and San Bernardino counties that depend on supplies from the State Water Project. Officials said the change reflects improvements in the available supplies, but they urged residents and businesses to continue conserving to help address what is still a [water deficit](#), and to prepare for expected cuts in supplies from the Colorado River's depleted reservoirs.

"This year's very [wet weather](#) has improved our water supply conditions enough that we no longer need to mandate the most serious of the restrictions that we had on nearly 7 million people," said Brad Coffey, Metropolitan's water resource manager. "But because we have to refill our storage that's been drawn down by this drought, and because of the longstanding drought on the Colorado River, we're still asking consumers to conserve. Conserving lets us refill storage and be prepared for another dry year."

The decision by the MWD board on Tuesday ends emergency drought measures that were imposed in June 2022, which required six of the district's member agencies to restrict outdoor watering to one day a week or reduce overall use to stay within certain limits.

The measures were intended to deal with the critical shortage last year on the State Water Project, the system of aqueducts and reservoirs that deliver water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to Southern California.

The series of atmospheric river storms have dramatically eased the water-supply deficit since January. Agencies that depend on the State Water

Project's supplies were only able to get 5% of their full allocations last year, but with the storms and the rise in reservoirs levels, [state officials](#) have told agencies they will be able to receive 35% of requested water supplies, and that figure is expected to increase further with the latest storms.

San Luis Reservoir, one of the large reservoirs that feeds the State Water Project, has risen to 88% of full capacity, and water is being delivered south to boost the levels of Castaic Lake and other reservoirs.

The MWD delivers water that its member agencies supply to 19 million people across six counties.

In December, the district's officials had said if conditions didn't improve, they anticipated implementing a regionwide allocation to address the shortages, which would have meant a shift to rationing water and mandatory restrictions throughout Southern California.

Now the situation has "turned around enough" that the district won't need to implement the water supply allocation starting this summer, Coffey said. "We don't need to take that next step, although we really need consumers to continue to use water efficiently."

On average, about one-fourth of Southern California's water supply comes from the Colorado River, where [reservoir](#) levels have dropped to record lows because of chronic overuse and 23 years of drought worsened by rising temperatures.

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