



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

## NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 15, 2015

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### **Water Commission Adopts Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance; Public Comment Helped Shape Revisions**

**SACRAMENTO** – New California yards and commercial landscaping installed after December 1, 2015 will use up to a third less water on average under the rules of a model landscape ordinance adopted today by the California Water Commission. The revised ordinance will not apply to existing lawns and landscapes unless they are modified significantly after December 1.

Prepared by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), the model ordinance effectively limits lawn in commercial settings to specific functional uses such as recreation and public assembly, requires efficient sprinkler nozzles in landscape irrigation systems and, with few exceptions, bans turf in street medians and parkways.

Commission Chair Joe Byrne said adoption of the ordinance “is an important step in ensuring that California’s future growth will respect the necessity to conserve the state’s water resources.”

These and other rules designed to ensure careful water use in newly-built landscapes are embodied in the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance. The model ordinance can be used by cities, counties and other land-use agencies in whole or as a guide in developing their own ordinances that fit local conditions but match or exceed the efficiency of the DWR version.

An executive order issued by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. on April 1, 2015 directed DWR to revise an existing model landscape ordinance through expedited regulation. DWR developed the revised ordinance, held public workshops on the revisions and conducted a 15-day public comment period. Input received during that period resulted in changes to the ordinance adopted today.

Major changes from the previous model ordinance include a reduction in the square footage above which landscape projects are subject to the ordinance. The threshold size was reduced from 2,500 square feet to 500 square feet for new residential, commercial, industrial and institutional projects. The average residential landscape size in California is roughly 2,500 square feet.

DWR's revision includes a prescriptive checklist as an option for compliance for landscapes less than 2,500 square feet, such as prohibiting turf in non-residential areas and in the areas between street curbs and sidewalks (parkways) that are less than 10 feet wide, subject to certain conditions described in the ordinance. The list also requires compliance with guidelines for the use of automatic sprinklers.

To encourage the reuse of water from sinks, tubs and washing machines called "graywater," the model ordinance allows landscapes under 2,500 square feet that are irrigated only with graywater or captured rainwater to meet a simple irrigation checklist and not be subject to the entire ordinance.

The revised model ordinance also includes improvements in:

- More efficient irrigation systems;
- Onsite stormwater capture; and
- Mandatory reporting on the implementation and enforcement of the ordinance by local agencies.

The ordinance requirements will take effect December 1, 2015 and apply to landscaping built or significantly modified to the point of requiring a local permit, plan check or design review.

The Water Commission provides a public forum for discussing water issues, advises DWR and takes appropriate statutory actions to further the development of policies that support integrated and sustainable water resource management and a healthy environment.

A complete description of DWR's original proposals, public comments and revisions is found here:

[https://cwc.ca.gov/Documents/2015/07\\_July/July2015\\_Agenda\\_Item\\_8\\_Attach\\_1\\_Proposed\\_Revisions\\_to\\_MWELO\\_Final.pdf](https://cwc.ca.gov/Documents/2015/07_July/July2015_Agenda_Item_8_Attach_1_Proposed_Revisions_to_MWELO_Final.pdf)

In all, the newly adopted ordinance is expected to reduce the water use of a new home by 12,000 gallons a year, or 20 percent. Water use on new commercial landscapes will be cut by approximately 35 percent.

California is expected to add 472,000 single- and multi-family housing units with an associated 20,000 acres of new landscape over the next three years. The state's population is expected to grow by more than 11 million, reaching nearly 50 million people by 2050. New landscape standards are critical to ensure that new plantings are as efficient as possible.

State law requires all land-use agencies to adopt a water-efficient landscape ordinance that is at least as efficient as the model ordinance prepared by DWR. DWR's model ordinance takes effect in those cities and counties that fail to adopt their own. Land-use agencies also will be required to report on ordinance adoption and enforcement each year.

This is the fourth year of California's drought. To learn about the actions the state has taken to manage our water systems and cope with the drought's impacts, visit [Drought.CA.Gov](http://Drought.CA.Gov). Every Californian should take steps to conserve water. Find out how at [SaveOurWater.com](http://SaveOurWater.com).

