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State Water Board Adopts 'Stress Test' Approach to Water Conservation Regulation

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SACRAMENTO - The State Water Resources Control Board today 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.

Recognizing persistent yet less severe drought conditions throughout California, the newly adopted [emergency regulation](#) will replace the Feb. 2 emergency water conservation regulation that set specific water conservation benchmarks at the state level for each urban water supplier. Today’s adopted regulation, which will be in effect through January 2017, requires locally developed conservation standards based upon each agency’s specific circumstances.

These standards require local water agencies to ensure a three-year supply assuming three more dry years like the ones the state experienced from 2012 to 2015. Water agencies that would face shortages under three additional dry years will be required to meet a conservation standard equal to the amount of shortage. For example, if a water agency projects it would have a 10 percent supply shortfall, their mandatory conservation standard would be 10 percent.

“Drought conditions are far from over, but have improved enough that we can step back from our unprecedented top-down target setting,” said State Water Board Chair Felicia Marcus. “We’ve moved to a ‘show us the water” approach, that allows local agencies to demonstrate that they are prepared for three more lousy water years. This reporting will show us what agencies plan to do, and how they do, throughout the year. Trust, but verify. In the meantime, we’ll be watching and prepared to come back with the 25 percent state mandate early next year if necessary, which we hope it won’t be.”

All of the projections and calculations used to determine the new conservation standards will be disclosed publicly. They will include information provided by regional water distribution agencies (wholesale suppliers) about how regional supplies (including imported water, recycled water, groundwater, storm water, and desalinated water) would fare during three additional dry years. The regulation requires urban water supplier to continue their monthly conservation reporting.

The adopted regulation also keeps in place the 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. The adopted regulation is the result of feedback from urban water suppliers, 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.

“El Nino didn’t save us, but this winter gave us some relief,” said Chair Marcus. “It’s a reprieve though, not a hall pass, for much if not all of California. We need to keep conserving, and work on more efficient practices, like keeping lawns on a water diet or transitioning away from them. We don’t want to cry wolf, but we can’t put our heads in the sand either.”

As directed by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. in [Executive Order B-37-16](#), the Board will separately take action to make

some of the requirements of the regulation permanent. The new emergency conservation standards take effect in June and remain in effect until the end of January 2017. More information on the Board action today can be found [here](#).

Background

In his April 1, 2015 [Executive Order](#), Gov. 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 an immediate 25 percent reduction in overall potable urban water use. The regulation used a sliding scale for setting conservation standards, so that communities that had already reduced their R-GPCD through past conservation had lower mandates than those that had not made such gains since the last major drought.

On Feb. 2, 2016, based on Gov. Brown's [November 2015 Executive Order](#), the State Water Board approved an updated and extended emergency regulation to continue mandatory reductions through October, unless revised as they were today. The extended regulation took into account some factors that influence water use: climate, population growth and significant investments in new local, drought-resilient water supplies such as wastewater reuse and desalination. The February Board action reduced the maximum conservation standard to below 25 percent, but above 20 percent, depending on how credits were applied.

Since July 2014, the State Water Board has been tracking water conservation for each of the state's larger urban water suppliers (those with more than 3,000 connections) on a monthly basis. Compliance with individual water supplier conservation requirements is based on cumulative savings. Cumulative tracking means that conservation savings will be added together from one month to the next and compared to the amount of water used during the same months in 2013. Under the new reporting structure, 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.

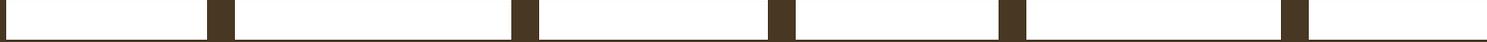
With nearly 1.3 million acre-feet of water conserved from June 2015 through March 2016, the state saved an impressive amount of water during the worst of the drought months. Statewide cumulative savings from June 2015 to March 2016 totaled 23.9 percent compared with the same months in 2013. During the last month of reporting, statewide average water use was 66 residential gallons per capita per day (R-GPCD) for March 2016.

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.

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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