



FAQs on California's Drought and Conservation Regulation June 2016

What action has the State Water Resources Control Board taken?

The State Water Board on May 18 approved modifications to its emergency conservation regulation to reflect improved water supply conditions and allow for more local decision making. The original regulation was adopted in May 2015 and required local water agencies to meet state-imposed water use reduction standards ranging from 4% to 36%. The modified regulation is consistent with directives included in Gov. Jerry Brown's May 9, 2016, executive order related to long-term water conservation goals in the California Water Action Plan such as "making conservation a way of life" and managing for dry periods.

What does the State Water Board's new regulation do?

Effective June 1, the modified emergency water conservation regulation replaces state-mandated, specific conservation standards with a locally driven, "stress-test" approach. Local water agencies are required to assess their water supply conditions and determine what level of conservation is needed to ensure adequate supplies for an additional three years of drought. The State Water Board will continue to collect and monitor water use and conservation data, and water waste restrictions (such as the prohibition on spraying down concrete driveways) are now made permanent throughout the state.

Does this mean the drought is over?

No, the drought is not over. While El Niño storms in January and early March boosted storage in key Northern California reservoirs and improved drought conditions in some places, the drought is not over. Some areas of the state continue to experience water supply challenges, and it is possible that extreme dry conditions could return next year.

If the state is still experiencing drought, why isn't the State Water Board requiring mandatory conservation anymore?

The State Water Board decided to end specific conservation standards in light of improved rain and snowfall in Northern California, strong conservation achieved to date and lessons learned over the past year about local drought resiliency. But while the state-mandated standards have been eliminated, that does mean the conservation ethic is going away. We are pivoting from state-mandated emergency conservation to a locally-driven approach that is more appropriate for conditions today. Extraordinary conservation requirements will be replaced in many areas with ongoing water-efficient practices.

Prohibitions on water-wasting practices such as hosing down driveways and washing cars without an automatic shut-off nozzle will continue.

How will the “stress-test” process work? Will anyone verify the data reported by local agencies?

Local water suppliers are required to use a state-specified formula for determining what conservation measures are necessary for their customers. Water suppliers must evaluate their local water supply assuming three additional dry years and customer demands based on 2013 and 2014 averages. Self-certification data and supporting documentation will be sent to the State Water Board, which will make all self-certification data and supporting documents available to the public and the media on its website. Monthly data on water use will continue to be submitted and posted online as well.

Do Californians still have to conserve water?

Yes, it is still very important for Californians statewide to use water wisely – especially outdoors. As we pivot from extraordinary, emergency conservation measures to ongoing conservation, Californians are urged to continue conserving water and to make permanent changes to their water use to ensure long-term water efficiency statewide. Conservation is part of the California lifestyle.

What happens if next year is critically dry?

The State Water Board will revisit its regulation in January 2017. Local water agencies will monitor and adjust their programs as necessary.