

Frequently Asked Questions February 20, 2008

The following Frequently Asked Questions were prepared by the Environmental Protection Division to assist water utilities, professional landscape installers and the general public in complying with new changes to outdoor water use requirements announced by Governor Sonny Perdue on February 6, 2008.

Water Utilities

Q: Along with modifying the restrictions for pools and landscaping, will the 10% below winter average modified permit limit be changed?

A: Yes, where drinking water supplies are sufficient, permit limits will be modified to 10% below 2007 average summer (April through September) water use in recognition that water use changes in the summer due to higher evaporation levels, water use for commercial air conditioning systems, watering of food gardens, summer activities, and other allowable water uses. We reiterate that “No outdoor water use is allowed, other than for activities exempted in 391-3-30-.05, or as the EPD Director may order” per 391-3-30-.04(6).

Q: How will this summer permit modification be implemented?

A: In February and March, EPD will consult with local governments, water utilities, and industries to determine that drinking water supplies are sufficient to allow the new permit limit to be based on 10% below 2007 summer (April through September) water use. EPD will set a schedule for these consultations beginning with the largest and/or most at-risk utilities. The consultations will include discussions of: 1) the projected status of the water supply through December 2009, 2) the water conservation measures being implemented, 3) per capita water use, 4) historical water use, and 5) other relevant factors.

The new permit limits will go into effect on April 1, 2008. Enforcement actions for the months of January through March 2008 will be limited to those systems with 2008 usage that exceeds the 06/07 winter average.

Q: The State has modified the exemptions to outdoor watering and pools. Can local utilities do something different?

A: Local governments and water utilities may adopt restrictions that are more stringent than the restrictions imposed by the State (per 391-3-30-.06(1)).

Q: My utility has an ample water supply - can we relax the restrictions? Can we get out of the Level 4 designation?

A: EPD is balancing three risk factors: 1) maintaining sufficient water supply during a prolonged drought period, 2) maintaining the economic viability of local communities throughout the state, and 3) maintaining the financial stability of local water providers. Upon request, EPD will work with individual utilities to determine if utility/location-specific conditions exist that would allow further modifications to the restrictions. These discussions will be held after summer permit limits are established. Enforcement actions for the months of January through March 2008 will be limited to those systems with 2008 usage that exceeds the 06/07 winter average.

Pools

Q: Will pools be able to open this season?

A: Yes. All existing indoor and outdoor pools will be allowed to open. Local governments and water utilities may adopt restrictions that are more stringent than the restrictions imposed by the State (per 391-3-30-.06(1)).

Q: Can I fill a plastic or vinyl wading pool for my children to play in?

A: Yes, subject to local restrictions, if any.

Q: What can I do to reduce the amount of water my pool uses?

A: The following are a few simple steps to use around the pool (*Source: California Urban Water Conservation Council at <http://www.cuwcc.org/home.html>*):

- Use a pool cover. It will reduce water loss due to normal evaporation. The cover can also reduce heating bills by preventing night heat loss and will save on chemicals too. Make certain that it fits properly. The cover is the number one water and fossil fuel conservation device! A recent study found that pool covers can reduce swimming pool water use by nearly 30% (Maddaus and Mayer, 2001).
- Repair any swimming pool leaks. Even a small leak in either pool equipment or the pool's structure represents a substantial waste. In fact, an inch-a-day leak in a 15-by-30-foot pool can waste approximately 102,000 gallons per year!
- If heated, reduce your pool and spa water temperature. Warmer water evaporates more quickly.
- Shut down unnecessary fountains and waterfalls. The effect of aeration loses a significant amount of water to evaporation.
- Manually clean your filter. You'll do a more thorough job and use less water. The average backwash uses between 250 to 1,000 gallons of water -- without completely cleaning your filter!
- Install a newer, more water efficient filter system.
- Limit diving, splashing and water fights in your pool and spa. Boisterous play causes inordinate amounts of water loss due to splash out.
- Maintain proper chemical levels and adequate circulation time. Not only will your pool water be safer and cleaner, but also you'll avoid the need to drain your pool or use excessive water to correct conditions of neglect.
- When you are filling your pool, be sure to keep an eye on your water level. Forgetting to shut off fill water can make for a costly waste of water.
- Plug the overflow line when the pool is in use. Keep the pool water in the pool.

- Turn off the tile-spray device on your automatic pool cleaner. Its splashing invites evaporation losses, and over spraying can send water right out of the pool! A good deal of that spray evaporates before it hits the tile.

Q: Where can I get more information about how to reduce the amount of water my pool uses?

A: Additional information about water conservation for pools may be found at www.conservewatergeorgia.net.

Outdoor Hand Watering

Q: What are the new requirements for outdoor hand watering?

A: Where drinking water supplies are sufficient, each household, business or other institution/property owner will be allowed to use one garden hose, 25 minutes a day, during designated hours on designated days to water plants only:

- The hose must be hand held during watering and equipped with a standard spray nozzle that automatically turns off when you release the nozzle.
- Allowed watering hours are within the hours of 12:00 midnight to 10:00 a.m.
- Odd-numbered addresses may water Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays
- Even-numbered addresses may water Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays

Q: Can I use my allotted watering time and water for uses other than watering plants such as outdoor washing or recreation?

A: No.

Q: What can I do to make sure I'm not wasting water?

A: While watering, aim the hose nozzle at the base of the plant to maximize delivery of water to the root system and minimize evaporative losses. Also, to reduce evaporation and maximize the water benefit to your plants, please mulch heavily around the root zone. However to reduce the possibility of disease, be sure that the mulch is pulled away from the trunk of the plant approximately 1-2 inches. For more tips on how to reduce water use while watering plants, please visit www.conservewatergeorgia.net.

Q: Can my local government/utility enforce more stringent restrictions?

A: Yes, local governments and water utilities may adopt restrictions that are more stringent than the restrictions imposed by the State (per 391-3-30-.06(1)).

Newly Installed Landscape

Q: What are the current requirements for watering newly installed landscapes?

A: Under the current requirements, new landscaping may be installed by anyone (professional or homeowner/property owner) and may be watered as follows:

- Beginning March 15, 2008, any person who has registered with the Outdoor Water Use Registration Program at <http://www.urbanagcouncil.com/> may water their newly installed landscape.
- Allowed watering hours are within the hours of 12:00 midnight to 10:00 a.m.
- Watering is allowed for 30 days during a period of 10 weeks (3 days a week for 10 consecutive weeks on an odd-even schedule).
 - Odd-numbered addresses may water Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays,
 - Even-numbered addresses may water Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays.
- As the landscaping is being installed, it may be watered-in at any time of the day on any day, but your plants will uptake the water better if you plant early in the morning or later in the day as the temperature is cooling down.

Q: What is a “newly installed” landscape?

A: A “newly installed landscape” is any plant that has been in place less than 30 days.

Q: Is replanting or reseeding my existing lawn considered to be newly installed landscape?

A: Yes.

Q: What type of watering is allowed?

A: Watering of newly installed landscape as described in this FAQs are allowed by persons who have registered with the Outdoor Water Use Registration Program. However if new installation consists of a small number of plants or is a small area, we urge you to hand water, use soaker hoses, micro-irrigation or drip irrigation; but for larger areas, you may use a traditional irrigation system. We again urge you to be proactive: use the most water efficient irrigation methods that are available to you and if you are installing a new system, please investigate micro-irrigation and drip systems. If you have an existing irrigation system, we recommend that you hire a certified irrigation professional to perform an audit on your system to ensure that the system is operating efficiently.

Q: Can local governments and water utilities enforce more stringent rules?

A: Local governments and water utilities may adopt restrictions that are more stringent than the restrictions imposed by the State (per 391-3-30-.06(1)).

Q: Do the current (February 2008 Order) requirements replace the exemptions found in the Rules for Outdoor Water Use (391-3-30-.05)?

A: The Rules for Outdoor Water Use (391-3-30) may be found at the following web site: http://www.gaepd.org/Files_PDF/rules/rules_exist/391-3-30.pdf

The February 2008 order supercedes the exemptions in 391-3-30-.05(3a), 391-3-30-.05(3b) and 391-3-30-.05(5a). In other words:

- Plants may be watered for 30 days over a 10 week period as described above on an odd-even schedule.
- Landscapes may be installed by anyone (professional or non-professional).
- All other commercial exemptions remain the same.

Q: What is the process to register for watering a newly installed landscape?

A: If you have access to the Internet, please go to www.urbanagcouncil.com beginning March 15. Look for the 'Water Conservation' tab or 'Outdoor Water Use Registration Program' tab.

If you do not have Internet access, call the County Extension Agent in your county or inquire at your local retail plant store later this spring.

By successfully completing the registration program, you will better understand global water resources, Georgia's water resources, best landscape practices and proper watering techniques. After passing a test with at least 70% correct answers, you will 'register' and print a certificate to display in a prominent location on the property. You will also sign a pledge that you will reduce your overall water use by at least 10%.

Q: Realizing that our weather patterns may be changing and that some plants are better adapted to Georgia's growing conditions, what kinds of plants should I select?

A: Please make every effort to choose the right plant for the right place: sun vs. shade, wind exposure, soil conditions, and type of plant ('natives,' grandmother type plants, non-invasives, etc.). Make an effort to educate yourself about plant selection and characteristics; consider how these plants may be used to protect our water resources and create an esthetically pleasing, wildlife nurturing habitat. This will save time and money while also protecting and conserving our precious natural resources.

If you are not blessed with good soil conditions (heavy clay or very sandy soil), prepare soil in advance of planting. If you are not familiar with these practices, consult with your local Cooperative agent, conduct research on the Internet or visit your local library and discover soil amendment materials and methods that you might use. Also, our state is

blessed with a wealth of knowledgeable gardeners and programs which include extension service personnel, professional nurserymen, garden centers, home improvement stores, university folks, nature centers, state park staff, radio shows, television programs, print media and non-profits. Be sure you tap these resources and rely on professionals in your area.