

## City of Palo Alto Utilities (CPAU) Drought FAQ

---

1. [What drought measures have been approved and are being applied currently?](#)
  2. [How are you enforcing the drought measures?](#)
  3. [Didn't the Governor recently declare a mandatory water cutback?](#)
  4. [How does this mandatory water reduction affect Palo Alto?](#)
  5. [When will we know what Palo Altans are expected to do?](#)
  6. [Will Palo Alto be able to meet the Governor's request for conservation?](#)
  7. [What are some of the more effective ways for Palo Alto customers to conserve water?](#)
  8. [Has there been a decrease in water usage since the measures were first implemented?](#)
  9. [When was consensus reached that Palo Alto needed to take drought measures?](#)
  10. [What is Palo Alto's final goal with the drought measures?](#)
  11. [What are some tips or suggestions that you have for Palo Alto residents, businesses and students/youth to conserve water?](#)
  12. [Have the measures implemented had an effect on water consumption?](#)
  13. [How severe is the drought in Palo Alto?](#)
  14. [How does the severity of Palo Alto's drought situation compare to the rest of California?](#)
  15. [Overall, how receptive have the people of Palo Alto been to the drought measures so far?](#)
  16. [How are you spreading awareness about conserving water?](#)
  17. [What feedback have you received from citizens about the drought measures?](#)
  18. [Are there aspects of the measures that the city has changed in response to the feedback \(if any\)?](#)
  19. [How can we provide feedback or ask questions about the drought?](#)
- 

### 1. What drought measures have been approved and are currently in effect in Palo Alto?

In response to emergency drought conditions, Palo Alto's City Council adopted new water use restrictions for the City at its May 11 meeting. Read a brief [summary of the water use restrictions](#). Effective **May 12, 2015**, the following water uses are prohibited in Palo Alto:

#### State Regulations Restricting Use of Potable Water

1. The City must reduce water use by 24% for the period June 1, 2015 through February 28, 2016 compared to 2013 usage and must report use on monthly basis to the State Water Resources Control Board.
2. Flooding or runoff is prohibited.
3. A shut-off valve is required for hoses used to wash vehicles, buildings, etc.
4. Applying water to driveways and sidewalks is prohibited, except where necessary to address an immediate health and safety need or to comply with a term or condition in a permit issued by a state or federal agency.
5. Water in fountains or other decorative water feature must be recirculated.
6. Irrigation of landscapes or turf during and within 48 hours after a measurable rainfall is prohibited.
7. Restaurants and other food service operations shall serve water to customers only upon request.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

8. Hotels and motels shall provide guests with the option of choosing not to have towels and linens laundered daily.
9. Irrigation of ornamental turf on public street medians is prohibited.
10. Landscape irrigation for new development must comply with state and local building codes.
11. Leaks must be fixed as soon as possible.

**Additional City of Palo Alto Restrictions Currently In Effect:**

1. Irrigation of ornamental landscapes<sup>1</sup> or turf with more than two days per week is prohibited.<sup>2</sup> Properties with odd or no addresses may be irrigated on Mondays and Thursdays. Properties with even addresses may be irrigated on Tuesdays and Fridays.
2. Landscape or turf irrigation is not allowed between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., except for drip irrigation, soaker hoses and hand watering.
3. Broken or defective plumbing and irrigation systems must be repaired or replaced within a reasonable period.
4. Potable water for construction uses is prohibited if non-potable water is available.

## **2. How are you enforcing the drought measures?**

The City of Palo Alto hired a water waste coordinator in September 2014 to assist with our drought response actions. As for the water use regulations that have been in effect since August 4, we are logging notices about water use infringements and dispatching staff to educate community members about our drought regulations. Many calls or emails come from residents who want to report runoff, leaks, or other observations of perceived water waste. The City now offers a web and mobile application tool for reporting water waste through [PaloAlto311](#). When we receive a report of an infraction, we attempt to talk with the customer, and if not present at the time of our visit, place a door hanger with a reminder about our drought conditions, current water use regulations and resources available to assist with water use efficiency needs.

On **September 15, 2014**, Palo Alto City Council [adopted a plan](#) for responding to incidents of the water use restrictions and we are continuing to follow this enforcement plan.

- 1st incident: Doorhanger/Email/Phone call to customer
- 2nd incident: Doorhanger/Email/Phone call to customer
- 3rd incident: Certified letter from the Utility Director notifying customer of violation and potential future fines
- 4th incident: Fines (\$500 per infraction, per day) (PAMC 12.20.010)
- 5th incident or more: Flow restrictors may be installed

## **3. Didn't the Governor recently declare a mandatory water cutback?**

On **April 1**, Governor Brown announced California's first ever [mandatory statewide water use reduction](#).

[Return to Top of Document](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> "Ornamental landscapes" refers to landscaping for purely decorative purposes, to be distinguished from edible gardens or landscapes that provide a function beyond aesthetics.

<sup>2</sup> Customers may apply for City approval of an alternative irrigation schedule that achieves an equivalent or greater potable water use reduction, but under no circumstances shall outdoor irrigation of ornamental landscapes or turf with potable water be permitted to occur seven days per week.

The Governor's executive action mandates that the state's more than 400 urban water supply agencies reduce water consumption by 25 percent.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

#### **4. How does this mandatory water reduction affect Palo Alto?**

The Palo Alto City Council approved new [water use restrictions](#) this week in an effort to meet a new water use reduction target set by the State. Palo Alto is now tasked with reducing Citywide water consumption by 24% compared to 2013 levels.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

#### **5. Will Palo Alto be able to meet the Governor's request for conservation?**

On January 31, 2014, Palo Alto's water supplier, SFPUC, asked all agencies that it serves to voluntarily reduce water use by 10%. From February through December 2014, Palo Alto used 16% less water than in 2013 and achieved the highest water savings of all retail water agencies in Santa Clara County. We believe that a 24 percent reduction would not be out of reach if we continue to implement our water reduction strategies. However, we will all need to step up our efforts to achieve an increased water use reduction target. We are asking all customers to pitch in wherever they can to help reduce overall City water use.

Palo Alto's water use from January through March 2015 was about 6% lower than it was for the same time during 2013. We hope to see this conservation number increase significantly as we enter the warm, dry, summer months when people often irrigate their landscapes. The City is asking everyone to do their part and help us conserve water. If the City does not meet its water use reduction target (still to be officially determined by the State), the State may impose fines of up to \$10,000 per day.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

#### **6. What are some of the more effective ways Palo Alto customers can conserve water?**

To encourage more conservation, the City has [increased its rebates](#), offered new water efficiency programs, received two [grants for innovative water-saving technologies](#) from SCVWD and expanded customer outreach about water supply conditions.

One of the easiest water-saving tips we recommend to residents and businesses is to check for and repair leaks, both indoors and out. [Leak detection](#) can be relatively easy – simply turn off all water-using fixtures on-site, then look at the water meter to see if the triangular flow detector dial is spinning. If so, it means that water is flowing through the meter to some location on the property, indicating a potential leak. Leaks are common in irrigation systems and toilets, both of which can waste a lot of water. The City is exploring some innovative metering technologies on a broader scale that will better assist our customers with leak detection and real-time water use monitoring.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

Landscape water efficiency is another great way to conserve a large volume of water. Rebate levels are higher than ever for converting turf grass to a low water use landscape design and upgrading irrigation hardware.

- [Buying and using compost \(or making your own\)](#) can help keep your garden healthy with less water.
- View [sample water-wise landscapes and specific plants](#) in this interactive picture gallery to generate ideas for your own low water use landscape design. [Rebates are available](#).

We want to remind people to continue irrigating trees during the drought. Trees represent high-value landscape that requires a long-term, significant investment. A healthy urban canopy offers many benefits to the community and environment. Visit Canopy's online [Tree Library](#) to pick drought resistant trees before planting. Canopy also provides watering [instructions](#), [tree care guides](#), and [more](#).

There are also many ways to maximize the efficiency of indoor water use. For example, we offer [rebates](#) for upgrading older toilets, clothes washers, food service and other commercial equipment to high-efficiency models. Modern appliances and fixtures are both water and energy efficient, which helps customers save money on their utility costs. We provide low-flow showerheads, faucet aerators and automatic shut-off hose nozzles free of charge. And for those people willing to take shorter showers, we give out free 5 minute shower timers. Contact our partners in water conservation, the Santa Clara Valley Water District at [www.valleywater.org](http://www.valleywater.org) or (408) 630-2554 to request these free of charge.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

## **7. Has there been a decrease in water usage since the measures were first implemented?**

Staff is closely tracking water use to measure any reductions in usage. From February 2014 through December 2014, Palo Alto reduced its consumption by 16% compared to the same time in 2013. In 2015, cumulative savings in comparison to 2013 were about 6% through March.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

## **8. When was consensus reached that Palo Alto needed to take drought measures?**

On July 15, 2014, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) approved emergency drought regulations for urban water conservation. Prior to that, we knew we were facing dry year conditions, since we did not receive the winter rains that typically build up the Sierra Nevada snowpack and fill reservoirs to supply our state with water. Our water supplier, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), decided to call for a voluntary 10% water use reduction in late January 2014. In response to the voluntary conservation request from the SFPUC, we increased community outreach and education about the drought, raised rebate levels for water-saving projects and began offering new water efficiency programs to our customers.

The City has permanent water use regulations in the Municipal Code that prohibit irrigation runoff and other water wasting activities. However, the new July 2014 State regulations triggered additional restrictions on outdoor water use and Palo Alto City Council approved new measures on August 4, 2014.

On March 17, 2015, the State adopted additional emergency drought regulations. Then, on April 1,

[Return to Top of Document](#)

2015, Governor Brown announced California's first ever [mandatory statewide water use reduction](#). This [executive action](#) mandates the state's more than 400 urban water supply agencies to reduce water consumption by 25 percent. The State Water Resources Control Board was tasked with determining how much water individual agencies will need to conserve in order to comply with the statewide mandate. In early May, the State adopted text for the [emergency drought regulations](#), including a new 24% water use reduction target for Palo Alto. Read [frequently asked questions](#) from the State. The mandatory water use reduction targets become effective beginning June 1, 2015.

On May 11, the Palo Alto City Council approved new water use restrictions in order to comply with the State's timeline for adoption and to meet its new water use reduction target established by the State. Read the [Staff Report](#) here.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

### **9. What is Palo Alto's final goal with the drought measures?**

The City is asking everyone to do their part to help us stretch our water supplies. Palo Alto must achieve an overall water use reduction of 24% between June 1, 2015 through February 28, 2016, or potentially face fines of up to \$10,000 per day. The City is required to report monthly water usage and drought enforcement activities to the State Water Resources Control Board.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

### **10. What are some tips or suggestions that you have for Palo Alto residents, businesses and students/youth to conserve water?**

Palo Alto partners with the Santa Clara Valley Water District on a number of conservation programs, including free home water surveys through the Water-Wise House Call program. We encourage every resident to check their home for leaks, ensure irrigation systems are running efficiently, and consider upgrading water using fixtures to efficient models. Rebates are available for many fixture upgrades or replacements. The City and Water District provide free water-saving devices. Let us install low-flow faucet aerators, showerheads and check your home for leaks free of charge! Please call (800) 548-1882 to schedule this free Water-Wise House Call survey.

Students may want to consider surveying their school facilities to ensure that low-flow devices are installed in bathrooms, kitchens, classrooms, and that irrigation of landscapes is managed in the most efficient way. Post signs in restrooms and locker rooms, reminding people to use only the water they need. We can provide stickers to place on restroom mirrors. Consider a friendly challenge between school campuses to see which can reduce the greatest percentage of water. Hold an environmental fair to highlight water issues. Many non-profits and water agencies would likely be willing to table and provide free water-saving items. Encourage your school administration to replace any unused lawn with a low-water use landscape to demonstrate a commitment to water conservation. Students can participate in a relandscaping project to earn community service hours. Plant natives and develop signage so the new landscape or garden can serve as a demonstration project.

A few other simple ideas to consider at home include not rinsing recycled containers--if you turn it over and no food falls out, the container can go right into the recycling bin. Home composting is a great way

[Return to Top of Document](#)

to reduce water needed for irrigation, as it minimizes evaporation, holds moisture at the soil level and even keeps down weeds while nourishing the soil. This [infographic](#) has some other easy tips for saving water indoors.

Businesses can also participate in our water-saving programs and receive free installation of toilets, urinal flush valves, pre-rinse spray valves for dishwashing, low-flow faucet aerators, showerheads, and rebates for upgrading other appliances and equipment. Visit our [cityofpaloalto.org/water](http://cityofpaloalto.org/water) webpage for a comprehensive list of resources.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

### **11. Have the measures implemented had an effect on water consumption?**

From February 2014 through December 2014, Palo Alto reduced its consumption by 16% compared to the same time in 2013. In 2015, cumulative savings in comparison to 2013 were about 6% through March. Mandatory drought measures are not the only factor that affects water use reductions. Public awareness and engagement involving local government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector, as well as general understanding in the community about the many implications of drought – for social, environmental and economic reasons – can profoundly impact how resources are utilized. In this case, the more involved and connected we all can be will help us reach our common goal.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

### **12. How severe is the drought in Palo Alto?**

Palo Alto's water is supplied by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) through the Hetch-Hetchy reservoir and distribution system. Like many water systems in the State, this regional water system is affected by the ongoing dry conditions. This is why the SFPUC was asking its retail and wholesale customers to voluntarily curtail water consumption by 10% during the year 2014 and continued that call into early 2015. While our water supply is not quite as stressed as other areas of the state, precipitation and water storage levels are lower than average years.

The graphs linked below are directly from the SFPUC website. They illustrate the current water supply situation for the regional water system. You can read the descriptions on the webpage:

<http://sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=69>

- Graph 1: [Precipitation at Hetch Hetchy](#)
- Graph 2: [System Storage](#)

[Return to Top of Document](#)

### **13. How does the severity of Palo Alto's drought situation compare to the rest of California?**

Again, many areas of the State are facing extremely dry conditions. The SFPUC regional water system has some advantages over other systems, which is why we were under a voluntary 10% reduction request last year. If Palo Alto and our local agency partners continue to meet their water use reduction targets, we should hopefully be able to manage the existing water reserves for a short time without any

[Return to Top of Document](#)

more rain. However, Palo Alto MUST comply with the State's new mandatory water use reduction of 24%. This drought map of California shows the intensity of dry conditions in different areas of the State. <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/Home/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?CA>

[Return to Top of Document](#)

#### **14. Overall, how receptive have the people of Palo Alto been to the drought measures so far?**

Most people seem to be very aware of the State's drought conditions, and a lot of people are choosing to conserve water on their own. Many have also heard about the State's emergency drought regulations from the City and/or in the news, so they are contacting the City to ask what is required of them in Palo Alto. These factors, together with increased rebate amounts for key conservation programs, new water efficiency programs for residents and businesses and expanded customer outreach about water supply conditions, have helped our water conservation efforts. We feel that our community is successfully responding to the request for water use reductions and we encourage people to keep up the good work.

We will all need to step up to the challenge and increase our water conservation efforts in order to meet the 24% water use reduction percentage from the State.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

#### **15. How are you spreading awareness about conserving water?**

The City provides information to residents and businesses through utility bill inserts, messages on bills, ads in the local papers and other publications, television commercials, online videos, participation in community outreach events, neighborhood presentations, on our website at [cityofpaloalto.org/water](http://cityofpaloalto.org/water), through social media sites such as [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). We welcome the opportunity to attend a school, work or neighborhood function to provide educational materials and talk with people about what they can do to improve efficiency. Contact us at [UtilitiesCommunications@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:UtilitiesCommunications@cityofpaloalto.org) with speaking engagement requests.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

#### **16. What feedback have you received from citizens about the drought measures?**

It seems that many people in the community support the City taking additional actions to combat the drought. Water is such a critical resource and a lot of people realize that during shortages outdoor irrigation is secondary to using water for drinking, cooking, sanitary purposes and environmental habitat preservation.

There are requests for us to further explore use of alternative water sources for irrigation or other non-potable purposes. We are evaluating all options for use of graywater (we offer [rebates for graywater use](#)), rainwater ([rebates also available](#)), recycled water and "dewatered" groundwater. Currently, some new construction projects in which a basement, garage or other underground structure is going in, the groundwater from the shallow aquifer must be pumped out. When feasible, the City is requiring contractors to install a valve station in order to allow this water to be captured and reused for non-potable purposes such as landscape irrigation. Read our [FAQs on this practice](#).

[Return to Top of Document](#)

**17. Are there aspects of the measures that the city has changed in response to the feedback (if any)?**

The City has adopted [water use restrictions](#) for compliance with State mandates and to achieve the 24% water use reduction goals. The current measures in effect that City Council adopted on May 11 are designed to meet these obligations. Community feedback indicates general support for increased conservation efforts. We have significantly increased our outreach and education about the drought and raised rebate levels to encourage people to take action. As we ask people to cut back on their water use for landscape irrigation, we want to remind people to not stop irrigating their trees. Our urban canopy represents a long-term significant investment in the City's landscape. Trees provide many benefits to the community and it is important for us to preserve their health, even during drought conditions.

[Return to Top of Document](#)

**18. [How can the community provide the City with feedback or ask questions about the drought?](#)**

City of Palo Alto staff are always interested in hearing from the community. Your feedback is welcome. Please feel free to share your comments, suggestions and/or questions with us at [UtilitiesCommunications@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:UtilitiesCommunications@cityofpaloalto.org) Thank you for the opportunity to share information on this subject.

Please visit [cityofpaloalto.org/water](http://cityofpaloalto.org/water) for the most up-to-date information on water supply conditions, drought measures and many resources for water use efficiency.

Remember, it is important to use water wisely every day, regardless of drought conditions. Thank you for doing your part to help Palo Alto meet its water efficiency goals!

[Return to Top of Document](#)