

Proposed Changes to the Water Shortage Ordinance

Overview

The Water Shortage Ordinance (WSO) has been in place since 2002 and establishes the rules that govern the response options available to City Council during a water shortage. This Ordinance is a key means for City Council and Colorado Springs Utilities to protect water supply, maintain water service essential for public health and safety, and minimize adverse impacts to economic activity during a water shortage.

Colorado Springs Utilities has proposed updates to the existing Water Shortage Ordinance to include a long-term focus on reducing the waste of water at all times, updating the water shortage response rules, and removing rules that have been superseded by new state laws. This program will contribute 10% to our overall savings target – 375 acre-feet in 2021 and 450 acre-feet by 2030 which, in turn, will provide a future source of supply for our community.

Background

The current WSO prohibits water waste during a declared (short-term) water shortage. Water waste is the use of water that offers no benefit to our customers and community. Adding water-wise rules to the WSO is a long-term water savings practice that assures the efficient use of water, and over time, reliable water savings for future supply. As our community and water demands grow, reducing waste also will help prevent implementing restrictions more often.

Our existing, voluntary programs encourage water-wise use for customers who are interested in making changes, but some customers choose not to participate in these programs. It takes a group of carefully coordinated programs to successfully meet overall water savings targets. Establishing water-wise rules is a key component of successful water efficiency programming.

As Colorado Springs continues to grow, we will need to acquire additional water supply and improve storage capacity to meet our growing city's needs. It's critical to have a strong water efficiency program when permitting new supply and storage projects. These rules demonstrate our stewardship of the water we already have and a commitment to conservation.

The Proposed Water Waste Changes:

The following actions will be considered water waste in the updated WSO:

1. Watering landscaped areas, other than with drip irrigation, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. during the period from May 1 to October 15.
2. Watering landscaped areas with potable water more than three (3) days per week, with the following exceptions:
 - a. Watering under an establishment permit;
 - b. Watering under a water allocation plan;
 - c. Watering new plant material on the day of planting;
 - d. Watering of turf grass that is essential for high use sports fields;

- e. Operating and attending to an irrigation system as needed for installation, repair, or reasonable maintenance; and
 - f. Watering trees, shrubs, and plants (including vegetable and flower gardens) with a drip irrigation system, handheld hose equipped with an active positive shutoff nozzle or handheld container at any time.
3. Using water to clean outdoor impervious surfaces such as sidewalks, driveways and patios, except when cleaning with water is necessary for public health or safety reasons or when other cleaning methods are impractical or inappropriate.
 4. Applying water intended for irrigation to an impervious surface, such as a street, parking lot, alley, sidewalk or driveway, or any other water use outside, in a way that allows water to pool or flow across the ground or into any drainage way, such as gutters, streets, alleys or storm drains.
 5. Washing motor vehicles, trailers, boats and other types of equipment with a hose that lacks an active positive shut-off nozzle.
 6. Failing to repair or disable, for a period of more than ten (10) calendar days, leaking or damaged irrigation system components, service lines or other plumbing fixtures.

What is a Water Allocation Plan?

Residential and commercial customers who are not able to meet the three days per week watering requirement can apply for an allocation plan. An allocation plan defines a site-specific volumetric limit of water to be used for irrigation not to exceed the declared stage or outdoor landscape watering level. Water allocations are designed to give customers flexibility in meeting the water-wise rules, such as alternative schedules due to smart controllers, soil type, existing irrigation system conditions, etc. It does not give a customer more water or allow them to water during the 10am - 6pm window.

What is an Establishment Permit?

A permit for customers who need to water newly-planted sod and landscape plants more frequently than three days per week. The establishment permit will allow customers to water on a specific schedule for a limited period. Areas for cool season turf grass will require soil amendments.

Summary

To continue to meet our goal of providing a dependable water supply for our growing community, Colorado Springs Utilities has proposed changes to the existing WSO that will allow us to minimize water waste while establishing a foundational value of water in the community, meet water savings targets while causing minimal impacts to the landscape, and support our need to acquire additional water supply/storage for the future.

Changes to the Water Waste Ordinance will be reviewed by City Council on November 26 and December 10, 2019. If approved, water-wise rules will take effect January 1, 2020. After educating our customers and developing water allocation plans throughout 2020, Utilities will begin education-based enforcement in 2021. Those customers who continue to waste water after receiving education and tools to assist them will be fined.