

Proposed Changes to the City of Colorado Springs Water Shortage Ordinance

Overview

The Water Shortage Ordinance (WSO), which has been in place since 2002, establishes the rules that govern the response options available to City Council during a water shortage. The Water Shortage 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reducing the waste of water at all times, updating the water shortage response rules, and removing rules that have been superseded by new state laws.

The Situation

Through our work with commercial and residential water customers, we have discovered more than 15% overwater their landscape. We also know that some customers do not incorporate best practices around irrigation scheduling which can lead to significant water waste.

Our existing, voluntary programs help reduce water waste for customers who are interested in making changes, but some customers will not participate in these programs and it takes a group of carefully coordinated programs to successfully meet overall water savings targets. Prohibiting water waste is a key component of any successful water efficiency program.

The current WSO only prohibits water waste during a declared, short-term water shortage. To support best practices and create a foundational community value for water, we have proposed adopting water waste rules that consistently help eliminate outdoor water use that offers no benefit to customers.

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.

Prohibiting waste assists in meeting water savings targets which are difficult or impossible to attain otherwise. These proposed measures will help achieve needed savings and may assist in preventing more severe water restrictions.

The Proposed Water Waste Changes as of 9/23/19:

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

1. Watering landscaped areas 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:
 - i. Watering under an Establishment Permit (see below);
 - ii. Watering under a Water Allocation Plan (see below);
 - iii. Watering new plant material on the day of planting;

- iv. Watering of turf grass that is essential for high use sports fields;
 - v. Operating and attending to an irrigation system as needed for installation, repair, or reasonable maintenance; and
 - vi. Watering trees, shrubs, and plants (including vegetable and flower gardens, but excluding turf grass) with a drip irrigation system, handheld hose equipped with an active positive shutoff nozzle or handheld container at any time.
3. 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.
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 that allows the water to pool or flow across the ground or into any drainage way, such as gutters, streets, alleys or storm drains.
5. 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.
6. Washing motor vehicles, trailers, boats and other types of equipment with a hose that lacks an active positive shut-off nozzle.

What is an Water Allocation Plan?

A site-specific volumetric limit of water to be used for irrigation not to exceed the water waste or declared shortage outdoor landscape watering level. It can provide flexibility on when water is applied for customers that need alternative schedules due to smart controllers, soil type, existing irrigation system conditions, etc., while meeting the water waste rules and/or declared water shortage requirements. 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 turfgrass will require proof of purchase of soil amendments.

Additional modifications such as clarifying the drought response stages and the removal of outdated rules, have also been proposed. These changes, along with the final documents will be shared when finalized.

In Conclusion

To continue to meet our goal of providing and maintaining a dependable water supply, Colorado Springs Utilities is proposing 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 acquire additional water supply/storage to help meet the future needs of the city.