

Modified Phase III “Extreme” Water Shortage Restrictions

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are the new water restrictions for the Southwest Florida Water Management District?

A: The District’s Modified Phase III “Extreme” Water Shortage continues one-day-per-week water shortage restrictions with stricter watering hours beginning April 3, 2026, through July 1, 2026. The restrictions apply to all of Citrus, DeSoto, Hardee, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota and Sumter counties; portions of Charlotte, Highlands and Lake counties; the City of Dunnellon and The Villages in Marion County; and the portion of Gasparilla Island in Charlotte County.

Q: Why did the District declare a Modified Phase III Water Shortage?

A: The District received below average rainfall during its summer rainy season and currently has a 13.7-inch regional rainfall deficit compared to the average 12-month total. In addition, water levels in the District’s water resources, such as aquifers, rivers and lakes, are continuing to decline and many are severely abnormal. Moreover, public water supplies are extremely low for this time of year.

Q: When am I allowed to water my lawn?

A: Residents should check with their city or county for their allowable day and times as many have different schedules or stricter hours in effect. Below is the standard schedule:

- If your address (house number) ends in...
 - ...0 or 1, water only on Monday
 - ...2 or 3, water only on Tuesday
 - ...4 or 5, water only on Wednesday
 - ...6 or 7, water only on Thursday
 - ...8 or 9*, water only on Friday
 - * and locations without a discernible address
- Unless your city or county already has stricter hours in effect, watering hours are reduced to **12:01 a.m. to 4 a.m. or 8 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.** Properties less than one acre in size may only use one of these windows.
- Unless your city or county already has stricter hours in effect, properties **one acre or larger** may only water **before 4 a.m. and after 8 p.m.**

Q: What about my plants and shrubs?

A: Low-volume watering of plants and shrubs (micro-irrigation, soaker hoses, hand watering) is allowed any day but is limited to **before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m.**

Q: When was the last time the District declared a Phase III Water Shortage?

A: The last time the District declared a Phase III water shortage order was in May 2017.

Q: Can I replace my lawn and landscape?

A: Replacement of lawns and landscape is allowed, however, it's best to wait until the summer rainy season in June. New plants and sod require a lot of water to establish and March, April and May are the driest months of the year.

If you do decide to replace your lawn or landscape, new lawns and plants have a 60-day establishment period. On days 1-30, new lawns and plants may be watered any day of the week.

During days 31-60, new lawns and plants may be watered three days during the week. The user must maintain a written schedule of establishment period watering. Even-numbered addresses may water on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Odd-numbered addresses may be watered on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Q: Do these restrictions apply to me if I'm on a private well?

A: Yes, the water shortage order requires all residents, including those on private wells, to follow one-day-per-week watering restrictions.

Q: Do these restrictions apply to me if I use reclaimed water?

A: Reclaimed water is only subject to voluntary watering hours, unless restricted by the local government or utility.

Q: What happens if I receive a letter from my HOA that requires me to use water?

A: No HOA or other entity shall enforce deed restrictions or other community standards requiring an increase in water use, including replacement of plant material to meet aesthetic standards or pressure washing (i.e., driveways).

Q: Why does the District restrict lawn watering versus other water uses?

A: Outdoor water use accounts for more than 50 percent of water consumed by households and residents should know and follow their local watering restrictions. Limiting lawn watering to one day per week can greatly reduce the strain on public water supply systems and the aquifers. In addition, you can reduce your outdoor water consumption by checking your irrigation system to ensure it's working properly. This means testing and repairing broken pipes and leaks and fixing damaged or tilted sprinkler heads. You should also check your irrigation timer to ensure the settings are correct and the rain sensor is working properly in accordance with state law. For more water conserving tips, visit the District's website at WaterMatters.org/Water101.

Q: How are the water restrictions enforced? Can I get a ticket?

A: Water utilities and other local enforcement officials must increase their enforcement efforts, including responding to citizen complaints and monitoring water use through patrols or customer records. Starting 14 days after the effective date of the water shortage order, utilities and other local enforcement officials are to issue citations first without issuing a warning.

Q: How can I report a potential water restriction violation?

A: Local utilities are responsible for reviewing and implementing procedures for enforcing water shortage restrictions. Any violations should be reported to the appropriate local utility.

Q: Can I still pressure wash?

A: Pressure washing in preparation for painting and sealing is allowed. Pressure washing of driveways, sidewalks and other impervious surfaces is allowed for necessary maintenance, such as to either maintain a warranty or remove mold, mildew and other potentially hazardous material that cannot be removed by mechanical means (such as a broom or leaf blower), and as a construction practice (such as cleaning a concrete surface prior to painting or sealing). Compliance with homeowner association or other aesthetic standards does not constitute necessary maintenance.

Q: Can I still wash my car?

A: Car washing at home (~~non-commercial~~) is only allowed on your lawn watering day and you must use a hose with a shutoff nozzle. Consider using a commercial car wash that recycles water. Most modern commercial car washes use advanced recycling systems and use less gallons of freshwater than washing your car at home.

Car washing of fire trucks and other emergency vehicles is allowed.

Q: Can I still hold a charity car wash?

A: Car wash fundraisers held on behalf of non-profit organizations are prohibited, except for one-day events that were scheduled prior to the effective date of the Modified Phase III Water Shortage Order.

Q: Can I wash my boat?

A: Rinsing of boats and flushing of boat engines is allowed after each use when needed to remove salt water or to prevent the transportation of exotic plant or animal material.

Q: Are there restrictions on fountains?

A: Yes, fountains that are purely for aesthetic purposes are limited to **four** hours a day. The owner should select and post the operating hours.

Q: Are there restrictions on restaurants?

A: Yes, restaurants are required to only serve water upon request.

Q: Can I provide water to livestock?

A: Yes, water use that is necessary for the maintenance of livestock is allowed.

Q: How can I conserve water?

A: There are many ways to conserve water both indoors and outdoors. Conserving water can also help save money on your utility bills. The District's [Water 101 for Homeowners](#) website has simple irrigation and water saving tips for indoors and outdoors.

Q: What is the District doing to ensure that we have water for both now and in the future?

A: The District is required by state law to develop a [Regional Water Supply Plan](#) every five years that assesses the projected population and water demands as well as the potential sources of water and funding to meet those demands over a 20-year period. The District's Regional Water Supply Plan provides a framework for future water management decisions and demonstrates how water demands can be met through a combination of alternative water sources, traditional groundwater, and water conservation measures.

Q: What's being done to ensure we have enough water with all this population growth?

A: Despite significant population growth over the last 40 years, the District has been able to reduce both groundwater withdrawals and total water use due to water conservation efforts, and the development of alternative water supplies and reclaimed water projects. The District has worked closely with the regional water supply authorities, such as Tampa Bay Water, over the last several decades to reduce the region's reliance on traditional groundwater supplies by developing alternative water supplies such as the regional reservoir and desalination plant. Looking to the future, the District has prioritized more than **\$600 million** in cooperative funding for [alternative water supply projects](#) in Tampa Bay, Polk County and our southern region counties to meet the projected needs of the growing population over the next 20 years.

Q: Why should we have to conserve even more water if the District keeps approving new permits for construction?

A: We should always conserve water because it is a limited resource. Conservation means not being wasteful.

Land-use decisions regarding growth and community development are made by local city and county governments. District permitting involving new developments is limited to stormwater management to reduce the risks of new development causing flooding or degrading the quality of the stormwater runoff and to protect the functions of the wetlands in the watershed.

In some cases, a development also wants to create its own water utility rather than accepting water from an existing government or private utility. In these cases, the development will need a water use permit from the District.

A water use permit grants the holder the authorization to withdraw specific quantities of water for a limited period of time under certain conditions.

To get a water use permit, the applicant must demonstrate an actual need for the water and that the withdrawal will not harm the environment or affect existing legal users.

Q: Why should I conserve water when I see golf courses or farmers watering?

A: Most golf courses and farmers have water use permits that have conservation measures built into the permit. For instance, determining how much water a golf course or a farmer needs is

based on the acreage being irrigated, the type of irrigation system being used, the type of turf or crop being irrigated and the types of on-site soils. In addition to demonstrating this need for a particular quantity, the permit holder must also demonstrate that the water withdrawal will not harm the environment or affect existing legal users.

During dry conditions, water shortage orders may put additional restrictions on a permit holder's water usage in the same way that additional restrictions are put on residences and businesses.

Under the Modified Phase III water shortage order, golf course fairways and driving ranges may be irrigated no more than once per week. Tees, golf course greens and practice greens may be irrigated no more than three times per week. Roughs shall not be irrigated.

Q: Why does the District continue to issue water use permits when there are dry conditions?

A: Dry conditions are short-term, temporary problems. Water use permits are longer term authorizations to withdraw water based on average conditions. We don't base the issuance of a water use permit on a drought any more than we would base it on a flooding event such as a hurricane. The District addresses dry conditions through water shortage actions, which are temporary measures that restrict water use among the various types of permit holders during the course of the dry conditions.

Q: Why doesn't the region use more desalination?

A: While we do have a major desalination plant in the Tampa Bay area, desal is the most costly alternative water supply option to operate.

Q: Why does the District continue to issue bottled water permits?

A: It's also important to remember each day we use more than a billion gallons of water in our 16-county district. Bottled water withdrawals are less than 1% of the overall water use. Whereas household irrigation accounts for about 20% of overall water use in our district. That means residents are using 20 times more water for lawns and landscapes than the combined bottled water permits issued to companies.