



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

March 11, 2010

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South Florida Transitions to Year-Round Water Conservation *Permanent landscape irrigation limits take effect Monday*



(Click on picture for a larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL — Sweeping year-round water conservation measures that will help protect South Florida's water resources into the future take effect on Monday, March 15, with the start of permanent limits on landscape irrigation throughout the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The SFWMD Governing Board today voted to rescind emergency restrictions that had been in place through water shortage conditions, so that the new and permanent conservation measures could begin.

“The move from emergency landscape irrigation restrictions to year-round water conservation measures marks a historic turning point for South Florida,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. “Water conservation in our region can no longer be a reaction to short-term adversity. Conservation has become a proactive

strategy to protect water resources for the long-term benefit of our environment and our communities.”

Developed with input from water users across the region after more than two years and 30 public workshops, the rule limits irrigation of existing landscapes to two days per week. A provision in the rule allows for three-day-a-week irrigation in counties south of Lake Okeechobee, including Broward, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties.

Residents and businesses in many areas will notice no change in irrigation schedules following the transition from emergency restrictions to the Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Rule. Highlights of the year-round rule include:

- 2-day-a-week watering in Charlotte, Highlands, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola and Polk counties. By local ordinance, residents and businesses in unincorporated Orange County should follow the St. Johns River Water Management District’s landscape irrigation rule, which limits irrigation to one day a week after Daylight Savings Time ends.
- Options for 3-day-a-week watering, unless more restrictive local ordinances are enacted, in Broward, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Miami-Dade, Monroe, Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties.
- Local ordinances limit landscape irrigation to two days a week in Miami-Dade, Broward and unincorporated Lee counties and in the City of Cape Coral.
- No irrigation, except as noted below, on any day between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Irrigation using reclaimed water, rain harvesting systems and various low-volume methods – such as micro-irrigation, container watering and hand watering with a hose and automatic shut-off nozzle – may be conducted at any time.
- Additional watering days are provided following the installation of new lawns and landscaping for up to 90 days.
- The District may grant variances for users of “smart” irrigation technologies described in Senate Bill 494, passed by the Florida Legislature in 2009.

The Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Rule provides local governments with the flexibility to adopt more stringent landscape irrigation ordinances at their discretion, based on local water demands, system limitations or resource availability.

The Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Rule is designed to curb water use in South Florida – the highest in the state at an estimated 179 gallons per person per day. Outdoor irrigation accounts for up to half of all potable water produced within the region. Up to 50 percent of the water applied to lawns is lost to evaporation and runoff with no benefit to the landscape.

The District estimates implementation of the Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Rule may reduce overall potable water demand by 5 to 10 percent, based on a recent

SFWMD study of regional demand reductions experienced during the 2007-2009 water shortage. Under a two-day-a-week watering schedule, the 44 largest utilities in the District saved an estimated 138 million gallons of water per day over a six-month period during the emergency water shortage.

Rescinding Emergency Restrictions

The decision to end emergency landscape irrigation restrictions reflects improved water conditions since the end of the record 2008-2009 dry season. The El Niño weather pattern has brought above average rainfall during the current dry season, and groundwater levels throughout most of the District are normal or above normal for this time of year.

During the 2009-2010 dry season, the District has already received more than double the rainfall compared to last year's dry season, which was the driest six-month period in South Florida history based on records dating back to 1932. The water level in Lake Okeechobee is nearly a foot higher than it was at this time last year.

Although some residents and businesses may irrigate three days a week under the new rule, two-day-a-week irrigation is often more than enough for South Florida lawns and landscapes, which typically need only three-quarters to an inch of water a week. Irrigation may not even be necessary if sufficient rain falls during the week. In addition, less frequent watering helps condition grass to develop deeper, stronger roots, creating a healthier, more drought-tolerant lawn that can better respond to dry times.

"South Florida's residents and businesses have learned many important lessons about water conservation from recent droughts," said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "Continuation of that educational process during more favorable conditions is crucial to the future success of the Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Rule and other water conservation steps taken by the District."

The Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Rule is a component of the District's Comprehensive Water Conservation Program, approved by the Governing Board in September 2008 to encourage more responsible use of water resources throughout South Florida. Numerous stakeholders worked with the District to define specific regulatory, voluntary and incentive-based programs and in-depth education and marketing plans that will help foster a year-round conservation ethic.

Statements of Support

"Broward County is pleased to have taken a leadership role in the water conservation arena by adopting a twice-weekly irrigation rule. Our new law closely models the emergency water shortage order of the South Florida Water Management District," said Kristin Jacobs, Broward County Commissioner, District 2. "Our water supply is finite, and if we don't change our water use practices, we'll pay dearly for it in the future. Water conservation is critical to meeting our long-term water supply needs."

“I would like to congratulate the South Florida Water Management District on the implementation of year-round water conservation measures, but I would like to encourage two-day-a-week watering in South Florida in an effort to conserve water in the future,” said Karen Marcus, Palm Beach County Commissioner, District 1. “I would also like to express my thanks to the District for working with local governments on this issue.”

“This is a community effort, and everyone has to take responsibility for conserving our precious water supply,” said Katy Sorenson, Miami-Dade County Commissioner, District 8. “I applaud the SFWMD for their leadership.”

For details on the Comprehensive Water Conservation Program and water-saving tips, please visit www.savewaterfl.com. More information about the Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Rule, including which days of the week irrigation is allowed, is available at www.sfwmd.gov/2days.

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About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state’s five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.