

# Conservation is more than a good idea now

'I hope people get involved. They really should - you know, it's their community.'

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**By JAKE BATSELL / The Dallas Morning News**

Until Monday, running your sprinkler system at high noon in Plano was merely a *faux pas*.



*Herschel Toberman, a senior crew leader for Plano utility operations, spreads the word that the city has initiated Stage 3 of its drought contingency plan.*

Now, it's illegal – and it could be a costly mistake.

Plano entered Stage 3 of its drought contingency plan Monday, joining a conservation campaign involving cities that draw water from parched Lake Lavon.



*City employees such as Herschel Toberman patrol Plano streets in 12-hour shifts to enforce water restrictions. Fines can be up to \$2,000, though first offenses would probably be less.*

City employees are now patrolling Plano streets in 12-hour shifts to enforce mandatory water restrictions, including a ban on landscape watering from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Fines run up to \$2,000, although first offenses will probably cost \$100 to \$300.

"The presence and visibility of seeing us, we hope, will get the message across to all our customers that the situation is serious," said Mike Rapplean, operations manager for Plano's Public Works Department.

In addition to the daytime watering ban, landscape watering is limited to once a week as determined by a five-zone map. The city also has set up a drought-response hotline: 972-769-4338.

"We're getting a lot of tattletales," Mr. Rapplean said. "We're trying to get by within 30 minutes of that call to go by and check."

Software engineer Bob Wagner said he has called several cities to report water violations and excessive runoff along his commute.

"I think it's important," said Mr. Wagner, who passes through McKinney, Allen and Frisco on drives between Plano's Legacy business park and his Lowry Crossing home east of McKinney.

"They're the ones that are invoking the law," he said. "I hope people get involved. They really should – you know, it's their community."

Mr. Rapplean said Plano's municipal court has set up a system that will fine first-time water offenders \$262, although the fine can drop to \$112 if paid before the court date.

Public Works Director Jimmy Foster said Plano has fielded requests for exemptions from about 25 people, ranging from a painting contractor to homeowners wanting to install new lawns.

McKinney, which has had Stage 3 restrictions in place since June 1, allows 30-day exemptions for new lawns. But city spokesman Steve Hill said McKinney still applies a 25 percent surcharge if customers use more than 10,000 gallons a month.

Collin County cities are deploying different enforcement strategies to curb water use. McKinney has sent out more than 1,000 warning notices – but, so far, no citations. Frisco isn't writing tickets, either, although city employees there have shut down more than 500 sprinkler systems over the past three weeks.

"This is just something new for all of us, and we're all trying to do the best that we can to get the water usage down," said Gary Hartwell, Frisco's public works director.

In Plano, Mr. Rapplean said the goal is not to reel off tickets, but to increase awareness as the region's drought continues.

"I don't want anybody to think we've got quotas, that we're trying to write as many tickets as we possibly can," he said. "We're just really trying to gain compliance."

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