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San Marcos adopts new water conservation rules

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The San Marcos City Council adopted new year-round water conservation and drought response rules Sept. 5, affecting homeowners and businesses. The generally stricter rules take effect Sept. 15.

Since San Marcos is currently under Stage 1 drought restrictions, the immediate impact will be to limit lawn watering with sprinklers and non-commercial car washing to once a week on designated days.

"The amendments were made to reflect the ever-increasing scarcity of water and to comply with state and EAA regulations," said Tom Taggart, Director of Water/ Wastewater Utilities.

The year-round conservation rules include requirements for new commercial car washes, cooling systems, dining facilities and landscape irrigation systems. "New" is defined as anything on which construction begins after September 30, 2006.

The rules also include stricter requirements for existing water users.

Self-service and mobile car washes are now required to use low-flow spray wands equipped with a positive shut-off device. Dining facilities must install flow restrictors and solenoid shut-offs on garbage disposals and must use low-flow pre-rinse spray valves with a positive shut-off device.

All automatic landscape irrigation systems must have a rain or soil moisture sensor, and large landscape irrigation systems must be evaluated at least annually.

The new year-round rules prohibit waste of water at all times instead of only during drought stage restrictions. Waste includes allowing water to run off property, operating a sprinkler system with broken or misaligned heads, and failing to repair leaks.

Use of sprinklers is still prohibited year-round during daytime hours, although the hours have been changed slightly. The new rules allow sprinklers before 10 a.m. and after 8 p.m.

Charity car washes are prohibited at all times unless held at a certified commercial car wash. Residents washing their cars at home must use a bucket or a hose equipped with a positive shut-off device. Open hoses are not allowed.

The drought response stages have been amended to be more consistent with the Edwards Aquifer Authority requirements and with other cities in the region.

In addition to being triggered by the J-17 index well, located in San Antonio, drought stages may now be triggered by either San Marcos or Comal spring flows.

San Marcos will likely go into drought stages somewhat later than the old rules provided but residents will have to do more when drought is declared.

"We are trying to eliminate the confusion and mixed messages caused by everyone going into stage restrictions at different times," Taggart said. "In the past San Marcos has typically gone into

stage restrictions before anyone else. Now we will go into stage restrictions when the rest of the region does, and our stage measures will be comparable.”

New Stage 1 Drought Response measures, effective September 15, 2006, include the following:

- Waste of water prohibited.
- Irrigation with sprinklers is allowed only one day per week on the designated week day before 10 a.m. and after 8 p.m. Your designated day is determined by your street number: 0 or 1, Monday; 2 or 3, Tuesday; 4 or 5, Wednesday; 6 or 7, Thursday; and 8 or 9, Friday.
- Non-commercial (at-home) car washing is allowed only on the designated week day.
- Outdoor swimming pools must be at least partially covered (25% of water surface area) when not in use.
- Filling of new decorative water features such as fountains and ponds is prohibited.
- Washing of impervious surfaces is prohibited unless required for health and safety.
- Restaurants may serve water only upon customer request.

Irrigation with hand-held bucket, hand-held hose, soaker hose or drip irrigation is allowed on any day and at any time. Customers are encouraged to reduce all other non-essential water uses.

Full text of the rules is available on the City of San Marcos website, www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/Departments/WWW. If you have questions please contact Jan Klein, Water Conservation Coordinator, at (512) 393-8010.