

El Paso may join cities with tight water rules

Daniel Borunda

El Paso Times

Car washing, lawn watering, yard turf and even swimming pools are targets for Southwestern and desert cities that are trying to conserve water.

El Paso City Council will consider an ordinance today intended to reduce water use by limiting grass turf to half the landscapable area of new homes. The proposal would also limit turf to a third of landscaping in new commercial properties. It also would ban some grass species that require more water.

It's not a new concept. The Southern Nevada Water Authority allows only half of the residential front yards in Las Vegas to be covered in grass. The driveway counts as part of the front yard.

"Non-drought tolerant" plants are limited to a small "oasis" in apartment, commercial and business properties in Tucson, said Mitch Basefsky, spokesman for Tucson Water.

In 1991, Tucson adopted an ordinance limiting the fountain and turf area allowed at apartments, or multifamily facilities. The so-called oasis areas can take up only 5 percent of an apartment complex's land. Oasis areas for commercial properties are restricted to 2.5 percent of the site.

"Any water feature or turf must be confined to the oasis areas," the ordinance says.

The rule does not affect houses, however.

Some of the tightest restrictions are in Santa Fe. Stage 3 conservation measures in the New Mexico capital include a ban on new grass, using fountains and vehicle washing at home.

"We went into Stage 3 in April, which is awful early. It isn't even the watering season," said Dan Ransom, Santa Fe water-education and compliance specialist.

Proposed law

- **Limits** turf grass on new homes to half of the landscapable area. Limits turf grass to a third of landscapable area of new commercial property. Types of grass also limited.

- **Limits** new carwashes to 50 gallons of water use per vehicle.

- **Applies** only to property for which a building permit is obtained after June 1.

- **Gives** the mayor the power to declare water emergencies.

Council meeting

- **When, where:** 9 a.m. today, City Council Chambers, second floor, City Hall.

- **Television:** The meeting will be broadcast live and replayed at 7 p.m. Tuesday on cable Channel 15.

- **Information:** 541-4127 or www.ci.el-paso.tx.us

Santa Fe County even imposed a moratorium on the building of new swimming pools, USA Today reported. Pool construction is still allowed in the city, but empty pools can't be filled with water, Ransom said.

"We will be in restrictions the rest of the year. We need a very good monsoon season," Ransom said.

Santa Fe gets most of its water from reservoirs and wells. The Santa Fe city council will consider adopting even stricter, Stage 4 measures this week.

Voluntary water conservation measures also are now in place in Flagstaff, Ariz., and are standard in other cities.

"I remember a time when the city (of Flagstaff) would charge for the first 10,000 gallons used a month and then give you the second 10,000 gallons a month free because they wanted yards to look nice," Flagstaff resident Howard Wren recently told the Arizona Republic. "Boy, how things have changed."