



Frequently Asked Questions
Drought and the Statewide Outdoor Water Use Schedule
October 24, 2007

This document answers these 24 general questions related to the current Drought Response Level 2 and Drought Response Level 4 outdoor water use schedule:

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Please note that local water providers can impose more stringent outdoor watering schedules.

*Citizens are encouraged to contact their water provider  
for the most recent update on local conditions.*

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**1. What is the current statewide outdoor water use schedule?**

Currently the state is divided into Drought Response Level Two and Drought Response Level Four.

Drought Response Level Four: The level four drought response was declared for all counties in north Georgia from Muscogee County on the Alabama line northeastward to Spalding County, and eastward to Lincoln County on the South Carolina line. The level four drought response includes all of metropolitan Atlanta, Rome, Athens and Columbus, but does not include the cities of Macon and Augusta.

**The following counties are under Drought Response Level Four:**

Banks	Dawson	Gwinnett	Meriwether	Spalding
Barrow	Dekalb	Habersham	Morgan	Towns
Bartow	Douglas	Hall	Murray	Troup
Butts	Elbert	Haralson	Muscogee	Union
Carroll	Fannin	Harris	Newton	Walker
Catoosa	Fayette	Hart	Oconee	Walton
Chattooga	Floyd	Heard	Oglethorpe	White
Cherokee	Forsyth	Henry	Polk	Whitfield
Clarke	Franklin	Jackson	Paulding	Wilkes
Clayton	Fulton	Jasper	Pickens	
Cobb	Gilmer	Lincoln	Rabun	
Coweta	Gordon	Lumpkin	Rockdale	
Dade	Greene	Madison	Stephens	

In those counties under Drought Response Level Four, no outdoor water use is allowed. Outdoor water use includes activities such as irrigating landscapes, washing vehicles, hard surfaces or buildings, water use for amenity fountains or ponds, and others. There are several exemptions to this rule (see FAQ #4 for a list of the exemptions.)

Drought Response Level Two: Counties not on the list above will remain subject to the level two drought response. A level two drought response declaration limits outdoor watering to the following schedule:

- **Odd-numbered addresses** are allowed to use water outdoors on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays from *12 midnight to 10:00 am only*.
- **Even-numbered addresses** are allowed to use water outdoors on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays *from 12 midnight to 10:00 am only*.
- **NO WATERING ON FRIDAY**

If your local water provider or local government has found that local conditions are drier, or water levels more restricted than the state conditions, they can impose more strict outdoor watering schedules.

*It is important that you contact your local water provider to find out if the local schedule is different than the state schedule.*

**2. To whom does the outdoor water use schedule apply?**

The outdoor water use schedule applies to customers (households and businesses) who receive water from an entity (public and private) with an EPD water withdrawal permit or an EPD permit to operate a drinking water system.

Note: If an entity or person withdraws over 100,000 gallons of water a day, they are required to get a water withdrawal permit from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD). If an entity serves water to 25 people or 10 accounts, they are required to obtain a permit from EPD to operate a drinking water system.

**3. What does the outdoor water use schedule accomplish?**

Water is a limited resource that needs to be used wisely. When the state experiences drought conditions, water resources become even more limited. Furthermore, outdoor water use in summer months can increase average use over 60%, stressing water supplies.

Considering that plants need no more than one inch of water every 7 to 10 days, outdoor irrigation use can easily be reduced by applying water only when and where it is needed. Limiting the time water is allowed does not sacrifice healthy landscapes. It can however, reduce peak demands; reduce the incidence for low water pressure in distribution systems; leave more water in the streams and aquifers; help local governments reduce the cost of production; and reduce the cost of water services to you and your neighbors.

The outdoor water use schedule was established to help conserve water by reducing outdoor water use. They apply to irrigation of plants and lawns, washing cars, washing hard surfaces (such as sidewalks, driveways, gutters, and streets).

**4. What activities are exempt from following the outdoor water use rule?**

The rule recognizes several activities that are exempt from complying with the outdoor water use schedule and water use restrictions. The following are explicitly exempted from the statewide outdoor water use rule:

- ◆ Use of gray water or cooling system condensate (in compliance with local codes)
- ◆ Use of “reclaimed water” for landscape purposes
- ◆ Irrigation of food gardens
- ◆ Irrigation of greens on golf courses
- ◆ Landscapes newly installed by certified or licensed professionals (only for 30 days)
- ◆ Other Commercial Exemptions:
  - Irrigation Contractors
  - Sod Producers
  - Growers (ornamentals, fruits and vegetables)
  - Retail Garden Centers
  - Power Washers

- Construction Sites
- Car washes
- Other activities essential for daily business (this exemption refers to activities that are primary operation of your business. For example, a window washing business would be included in this category, but a delivery company who washes their own trucks would not.)

**5. What can I do and where can I go to find out more information about ways to save water around my home?**

Drought Response Level Four: Practice these *waterSmart* landscaping tips to help your landscape survive without irrigation:

1) *Avoid added plant stress.*

- a) Don't fertilize if you can't water it in.
- b) Avoid any sort of soil disturbance
- c) Avoid adding fill dirt over plant roots because roots need to breathe.
- d) Mow grass higher than normal to avoid stressing it.



2) *Reduce Demand for Water.*

- a) Cut back plants that wilt or show die back to reduce their need for water from the roots.
- b) Many annuals and perennials can be cut back close to ground level during drought, then will bounce back when the rain begins.

3) *Use other water sources.*

- a) Collect the water that drips from your air conditioning unit.
  - b) Collect rainwater in rain barrels at the bottom of your roof downspouts.
- NOTE: Capturing of water from kitchen sinks and dishwashers, bathtubs, showers and lavatories, and the household laundry may require a variance to a local code or ordinance. Check with your local government to find out. See FAQ #17 for more information.

4) *Prioritize plants.*

Give priority to valuable specimen trees or shrubs that would be impossible to replace. Keep in mind that many annuals and turf grasses will bounce back after a dry spell and can easily be replaced.

5) *Mulch.*

- a) Cover the entire area under the plant from the trunk to the ends of the branches. This keeps the soil cool, combats weeds, and conserves water.
- b) Good mulches to use are pine straw, pine bark mini-nuggets, bark chips or shredded hardwood mulch.
- c) Enhance your mulch, by placing two to three sheets of saturated newspaper underneath it. This will help the soil retain moisture.

**Drought Response Level Two:** Keep in mind that plants need no more than one inch of water every 7 to 10 days. So practice these five *waterSmart* tips to save water, time and money:

1. *Water only once a week.* When it hasn't rained, a deep soaking every week will provide your plants with plenty of moisture.
2. *Soak, don't sprinkle.* When you water, aim the nozzle at the base of plants so more water will reach the roots.
3. *Don't water in the heat of the day.* You will only lose water to evaporation. If you have an automatic system, set it to come on in the early morning hours between 4am and 10am.
4. *Turn off your sprinkler when it is raining.* You can do this manually or if you have an automatic system, install an inexpensive rain sensor shut-off switch.
5. *Mulch!* Using pine straw, bark chips, or ground hardwood mulch on the roots of plants and trees helps the soil retain water.

More *waterSmart* tips are available to help you maintain your landscape and save water this year and in years to come. Visit [www.ConserveWaterGeorgia.net](http://www.ConserveWaterGeorgia.net) for tips and facts to help you and your neighborhood!

**6. I received a notice of violation or a fine for violating the outdoor watering schedule. Is this legal?**

Yes it is legal. Your local water provider and local government can enforce the schedule in the manner they feel is most appropriate for your area.

**7. My county has a different schedule than the state schedule. Why?**

Local conditions vary across the state. The statewide water use schedule was established to broadly help conserve water during drought conditions, but often local conditions are different than the statewide conditions. If local conditions are different than state conditions, your local water provider or local government has the authority to impose more strict outdoor water use schedules.

*It is important that you contact your local water provider to find out if the local schedule is different than the state schedule.*

**8. I get my water from a private well, am I allowed to water or do I have to comply with the outdoor water use schedule?**

Everyone in your area is experiencing dry conditions, so in the spirit of community and to help conserve limited resources, EPD encourages all water users to comply with the outdoor water use schedule or to not use water outdoors. However, EPD does not regulate private wells (withdrawing less than 100,000 gallons of water a day) therefore they are not subject to the outdoor water use rules.

**9. We have invested a lot of money installing new plants and turf in our yard. Can we water?**

Depending on who installed your new plants and turf determines if and when you are allowed to water. It is confusing, but the four bullets below may help clarify:

**Drought Response Level Four:**

- ◆ *Newly planted landscapes that are installed by professional landscape companies* may be watered any day, any hour for a MAXIMUM of 30 days after installation. This water may be applied by the professional landscape company OR the property resident. After this 30-day period, watering is not allowed.
  
- ◆ *Pesticides and herbicides applied by professional landscape companies* may water-in pesticides and herbicides on turf at any time.
  
- ◆ *Newly planted landscapes that are installed by a homeowner or business-owner (that is not a professional landscape company)* may not be watered.
  
- ◆ *Pesticides and herbicides applied by a homeowner or business-owner (that is not a professional landscape company)* may not be watered-in.

**Drought Response Level Two:**

- ◆ *Newly planted landscapes that are installed by professional landscape companies* may be watered any day, any hour for a MAXIMUM of 30 days after installation. This water may be applied by the professional landscape company OR the property resident. After this 30-day period, day/hour restrictions apply.
  
- ◆ *Pesticides and herbicides applied by professional landscape companies* may water-in pesticides and herbicides on turf at any time.
  
- ◆ *Newly planted landscapes that are installed by a homeowner or business-owner (that is not a professional landscape company)* may be watered any day for a MAXIMUM of 30 days after installation, but must follow hours allowed under the current outdoor water use schedule. After this 30-day period, both day and hour restrictions apply.
  
- ◆ *Pesticides and herbicides applied by a homeowner or business-owner (that is not a professional landscape company)* may be watered-in only on day/hours allowed under the current outdoor water use schedule.

**10. How does the State determine what level of drought response is necessary and which schedule goes into effect?**

Scientists at EPD monitor many indicators of moisture in the state to help determine if a “drought response” is necessary. The data and information to help determine if drought response is needed comes from EPD monitoring stations, the state climatologist, the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service and others. The indicators include:

- ◆ groundwater levels,

- ◆ streamflows,
- ◆ reservoir levels,
- ◆ rainfall in the past 3, 6, and 9 months,
- ◆ expected rainfall in the next 90 days, and
- ◆ water use patterns across the state.

Based on the information provide from these sources, the EPD Director, with the help from a diverse group of advisors, makes a decision to (or not to) declare advanced levels of drought response. Increased levels (1-4) indicate increased levels of drought response (see the State Drought Management Plan for details <http://www.gaepd.org/Documents/outdoorwater.html>).

For the latest information regarding drought indicators, download Dr. Wei Zeng's presentation to the Drought Response Committee from September 27, 2007 (available online at <http://www.ConserveWaterGeorgia.net/Documents/facts.html>)

**11. This is the time of year that I normally over-seed my fescue lawn. Can I water it in if I over-seed this year?**

EPD considers over-seeding of lawns new landscaping, and if conducted by a professional, allowed to water for the 30-day period of establishment (as discussed in FAQ #9.) However, local water providers may have stricter rules, so it is important to contact your local provider to ensure their jurisdiction is following these state rules.

**Drought Response Level Four:** No outdoor watering is allowed (even for overseeding) if the landscape work was done by you, the home or business owner. However, if you have contracted with a landscape company or licensed landscape professional, your lawn falls within the 30-day exemption (as explained in FAQ #22) and watering is allowed only during that window of establishment.

**Drought Response Level Two:** *Newly planted landscapes that are installed by a homeowner or business-owner (that is not a professional landscape company)* may be watered any day for a maximum of 30 days after installation, but must follow hours allowed under the current outdoor water use schedule. After this 30-day period, both day and hour restrictions apply.

**12. The golf course in my neighborhood seems to water all the time. How can they be allowed to water when the residents cannot?**

Golf courses are required to comply with a watering schedule, but because of the many different types of turf areas and landscapes on a golf course, their schedule is broken down by the type and/or function of turf area and landscape to be waters.

- ◆ **Drought Response Level Two:** golf course fairways must follow the “even address” schedule (Monday, Wednesday and Saturday between 12 midnight and 10:00am).
- ◆ **Drought Response Level Three:** golf course fairways can only be watered on Saturdays (between 12 midnight and 10am). Tees may be watered as well.

- ♦ Drought Response Level **Four**: Golf course greens only may be watered as needed.

It is also important to note that some golf courses irrigate with reclaimed water, which is highly treated wastewater from a system permitted by EPD to provide reclaimed wastewater. This reclaimed wastewater is safe for irrigation purposes and is exempt from the outdoor water use schedules.

### **13. When can I fill my swimming pool?**

Drought Response Level **Four**: Under most circumstances, filling of swimming pools and the use of ornamental fountains and water features are not allowed for areas under Drought Response Level Four.

Drought Response Level **Two**: Filling of swimming pools is allowed only during your designated hours and days. Also the use of ornamental fountains and water features is allowed.

### **14. Can I wash my car?**

Drought Response Level **Four**: No. Car washing is not allowed under Drought Response level four, unless you are in the business of washing cars (and have a current business license to operate.)

Drought Response Level **Two**: Yes, but only during the hours you are allowed to use water outdoors. Keep in mind that the schedule applies to ALL types of outdoor water uses, not just lawn watering. Under drought level two, pressure washing of hard surfaces (driveways, sidewalks, etc) by homeowners is prohibited. Pressure washing of structures (homes, garages, etc) is allowed, but must be done during designated hours and days.

### **15. My church is planning a mission trip and wants to raise funds through a weekend car wash. Since it is for a charitable cause, are we allowed?**

Drought Response Level **Four**: No - even though it is for a charitable cause, non-commercial car washes are not allowed under Drought Response level four. There is no exemption for fundraising activities.

Drought Response Level **Two**: Non-commercial car washes are allowed but only during the designated days and hours for the address where the event is to take place. There is no exemption for fundraising activities.

### **16. Can I use water from the hydrant to irrigate my lawn or the public area in my neighborhood?**

No, the use of water from a hydrant is only allowed for purposes related to fire fighting, public health, safety and flushing. These practices are to be done only by your water provider or local/regional government. In order to maintain safety and protect the quality of drinking water, any access to a fire hydrant **MUST** be coordinated through the local government who has jurisdiction over the public water supply system.

**17. Can I use water from my shower, sink, or washing machine to water my plants?**

Developing a water use system that captures and uses water from your shower, sink or washing machine is most commonly referred to as a “gray water system.” Gray water (as opposed to “brown” or “black” water from toilets) can be used for irrigation purposes, but there are many health concerns associated with personally developing this type of system. Re-use of gray water must be conducted in compliance with applicable state and local ordinances. Currently, the Georgia plumbing code requires all fixtures to be connected to either public sewer, or to an on-site sewage disposal system; however, some local jurisdictions may have adopted an amendment to the Georgia code. Spraying gray water is prohibited for any permitted system; application of the gray water must be sub-surface.

EPD does not recommend you develop your own gray water system. If done incorrectly, you or the person who lives in the house after you, could easily tap into a gray water line and unintentionally deliver gray water as drinking water. There are professionals trained for this type of work who could work with you to meet your needs and protect your health and the health of the folks who live in the house after you. Furthermore, because of the health concerns most local plumbing codes restrict the use of gray water systems. You would have to get a variance from your local government or get a separate permit to have such a system.

Many individuals choose to place buckets in their showers or bathtubs to capture water to be used for irrigation. This low-tech practice can help you minimize the water wasted down the drain while your shower water heats up. Some persons even remove the water from their washing machine and carry it outside for irrigation purposes. This gray water can be used for lawn and landscape irrigation, but must be used in a manner that it does not run off your property. One note of caution is to not use it for irrigation of any plants that produce food for immediate consumption.

**18. Can I water my tomato and squash plants?**

Yes, irrigation of personal food gardens is exempt from the outdoor water use schedule. *Please check with your local water provider to make sure they have not imposed more strict watering rules.*

**19. I have a creek (and/or a pond) in my backyard. Is it ok for me to pump water from it to irrigate my plants?**

EPD discourages pumping water directly from creeks and rivers for irrigation purposes. During drought periods, water levels and flow in creeks and rivers are already low, and pumping water from them will further diminish habitat the water needed for wildlife and waste assimilation. For ponds, you will need to consult with the owner of the pond (i.e. homeowners association or golf course) and consult with the local authority who has jurisdiction over the service area, before you pump water from it. If collectively you and your neighbors are pumping more than 100,000 gallons from the pond or lake you need to apply for a permit from EPD.

**20. Is the University/school in my town exempt from the outdoor water use schedule since they are such a significant contributor to our economy?**

If the university or school purchases their water from the local water provider, they are a customer of the local water provider and therefore (according to the state rule) subject to comply with the local schedule (which may be more stringent, but not less stringent than the state schedule). However, if the university or school has their own permit to withdraw water, they are subject to the current statewide water use schedule.

If the area to be watered is a ball field with no “official address” or an un-numbered area on campus, section 391-3-30-.01 of the rules state they are to comply with the schedule of an even numbered address.

**21. I have a koi pond in my backyard. I understand I am not allowed to use water for ponds or fountains, but what about my fish? What can I do to keep my fish alive?**

Drought Response Level Four: Maintaining aquatic life in a pond or fountain is allowed under the rule. If there are fish (or other aquatic life) already in the pond or fountain, you should continue circulating the water so the fish do not die.

Water use, circulation and aeration for ornamental fountains and ponds that do not support aquatic life, however, is not allowed under drought response level four. The reason for this is that circulating water or aerating water causes an increase in water lost to evaporation. If you have an ornamental fountain or pond, you are not required to drain the water from it, but you may consider storing the water that is there in another place where it can be covered to avoid mosquito problems that may arise. That stored water may then be used to irrigate plants or other priority landscape items.

Drought Response Level Two: Water use for ponds and fountains is allowed. Filling of ponds, fountains or other water features must occur during your designated days and hours.

**22. The rules refer to “licensed or certified” landscape professionals. How do I know if the landscaper in my neighborhood is licensed or certified?**

Right now, EPD considers a landscape business or professional with business license to qualify as a commercial operation. These individuals and businesses with licenses are therefore exempt from the outdoor water use rules. Individuals or operations that do not have a current business license do not fall in this category. Make sure you are working with a credible individual or business by asking to see his/her business license.

The University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Science, the Georgia Green Industry Association, the Metro Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association and the Georgia Turfgrass Association have partnered to offer a landscape professional training/certification program. This program is titled the Georgia Certified Landscape Professional (GCLP) training program. These certified professionals are trained to understand and practice Georgia-specific landscaping techniques, effective and efficient

irrigation, principles of xeriscaping, and other skills. For information about the program and a list of certified landscapers, visit <http://gclp.info/>.

Again, the drought response level four allows landscaping installed by a professional landscaper a 30-day period where watering is allowed. After the 30-day period the homeowner or business must comply with the current outdoor water use rule. Contact your local water provider to make sure the schedule and exemptions in your community is the same as the states.

**23. I need to wash my car and office building. Can I do this under the outdoor water use ban?**

Under drought response level four, you are only allowed to wash your vehicle at a commercial car wash. Pressure washing buildings must be done by a pressure washer or business with a business license to do so.

**24. Are soaker hoses exempt from the water use schedule and/or water use ban?**

No, soaker hoses that apply drinking water (or water from a regular tap) are a form of outdoor water use and therefore are not exempt from the schedule or ban. However, if your soaker hose is applying gray water (abiding by local ordinances and codes), collected rainwater, air conditioner condensate, or reuse water (from your water provider), then you are exempt from the rule.