



Frequently Asked Questions

Drought and the Statewide Outdoor Water Use Schedule

July 2, 2007

The purpose of this document is to answer general questions related to the current statewide Drought Response Level 2 outdoor water use schedule. 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.

What is the current statewide outdoor water use schedule?

Currently the state is a Drought Response Level 2, which means the following outdoor water use schedule is active:

- **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.

To whom does the outdoor water use schedule apply?

The outdoor water use schedule applies customers (households and businesses) who receive water from an entity (public and private) with a water withdrawal permit or a 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 15 accounts, they are required to obtain a permit from EPD to operate a drinking water system.

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).

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

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 for tips and facts to help you and your neighborhood!

I received a notice of violation and/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.

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.

I have a private well, 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. 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.

We just 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 when you are allowed to water. It is confusing, but the four bullets below may help clarify:

- ◆ *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 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.

How does the State determine when the water use 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>).

If I fill my watering can during “my hours”, can I hand water the plants in my yard or those in containers on the patio whenever I want?

The schedule applies to most outdoor water uses, including irrigating plants by device or by hand; washing automobiles; washing hard surfaces; and in some cases, using of water for fountains or other ornamental purposes. The outdoor water use schedule was developed to minimize water loss during the heat of the day (hence the limited time you are allowed to water.) Watering on your day before 10 am should provide your plants with the water they need, during the optimum time for them to take up the water and use it efficiently.

Another issue to keep in mind is enforcement. Those people enforcing the water use schedule do not know when you filled your watering can. Instead, they can only focus on the time and day of use, rather than time of collection.

The golf course in my neighborhood continues to water. 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.

- ◆ During drought level two, golf course fairways must follow the “even address” schedule (Monday, Wednesday and Saturday between 12 midnight and 10:00am).
- ◆ During drought level three, golf course fairways can only be watered on Saturdays (between 12 midnight and 10am).
- ◆ Watering of tees is not allowed in drought level four, but is allowed in all other levels.
- ◆ Watering greens is exempt from the water use schedule.

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.

When can I fill my swimming pool?

During drought level one and two, filling swimming pools and other water-related recreational activities is allowed during your designated hours and days. Drought levels three and four, however restrict filling of swimming pools and the use of ornamental fountains and water features (some exemptions apply).

Can I wash my car?

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.

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?

Even though it is for a charitable cause, non-commercial car washes are only allowed during the designated days and hours for the address where the event is to take place. There is no exemption for fundraising activities.

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.

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.

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.*

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.

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.