

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**The current drought is unprecedented in its impact to LVMWD. Learn how and why with these comprehensive FAQs.**

## **1. Are we really in a drought emergency and is it that bad?**

Yes, we are in a critical situation that warrants your immediate attention. The District will not have enough water to meet normal demands in the coming months. The District declared a State of Emergency on November 2, 2021, and the water supply situation has worsened since that time. We are in the third year of drought because there is below normal precipitation and snowpack in the Northern Sierra, which is 400 miles away and where our water is sourced. Snowpack this past winter peaked at 60 percent of normal in January of 2021 and was only 15 percent of normal as of April 13, 2022. Lake Oroville, where our water originates, is at only 48 percent of capacity as of April 13, 2022. While we had record rains and snowfall in December of 2021 – January, February and March of this year have been the driest on record. We are experiencing unprecedented climatic changes that have resulted in much lower rainfall, snowpack and runoff. The drought is critical and the situation is so dire that orchards and farmland in the central valley are being fallowed. Urban areas are also being mandated to conserve

## **2. Is it true that we may be going to one-day-a-week watering or potentially no watering at all?**

Yes. On April 26, 2022, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California adopted an Emergency Water Conservation Program that will require LVMWD (District) to limit outdoor watering to one day a week, effective on June 1, 2022. It was adopted by the District Board on May 17, 2022. There will be fines of \$2,000 per acre-foot of water supplied to the District for non-compliance with this requirement and/or failure to enforce it, which would be passed on to customers. If customers still do not conserve enough in the coming months, there could be an altogether ban on any outdoor watering.

## **3. How will the one-day-a-week watering restriction work?**

Until further notice, the District will continue to apply a 50 percent reduction to OUTDOOR water budgets and will also enforce the one day a week watering restriction. The two mandatory outdoor watering restrictions will work in tandem with each other. The 50 percent reduction to outdoor watering budgets is effective beginning May 1, 2022. The one day a week outdoor watering enforcement will begin on June 1, 2022. Traditional irrigation systems can only run for a maximum of 8 minutes (per each station/zone/valve) on the one day. Properties ending with an address in 0,2,4,6,8 can only operate irrigations systems on Tuesdays of each week. Properties ending with an address in 1,3,5,7,9 can only operation irrigation systems on Thursdays. There are exemptions. Hand watering and the use of drip systems is allowed on any and more than one day during each week. For more details and updates, visit [www.lvmwd.com/DroughtResponse](http://www.lvmwd.com/DroughtResponse) for the full list of measures and exemptions

## **4. How do water budgets work? What makes up my water budget?**

Every residential water customer has a unique water budget. The budget has two parts – an INDOOR budget and an OUTDOOR budget. The two combined make up a customer’s overall monthly water budget. The INDOOR budget is based on the number of people who reside in a single household and is 55 gallons per person per day. For a household with three residents, this equates to about 6.6 units of water for the month (2.2 units per person). There are 748 gallons for each unit of water. You can also get additional budget for livestock that can consume large amounts of water such as horses (no, you cannot get more for cats and dogs).

The OUTDOOR budget is based primarily on the square footage of irrigated area on the property, and there is a special math formula that is used to account for the rate at which plants absorb water and evaporation rates during different times of the year. Your OUTDOOR budget changes daily depending on weather conditions and is unique to each household based on where you live within the District. If you have a swimming pool, the area of your swimming pool is counted in the square footage of irrigated area, which enables you to top off the water level. If you have stables or an arena for horses, you can get additional budget for those areas to keep the dust down.

Your budget changes month to month. You can look on your bill to see what the estimate is for the next month, but ultimately it will change based on actual weather conditions, so it’s important to keep track of your usage. Customers can track their water use as compared to their budget using the WaterSmart Portal and can register at [www.lvmwd.com/advancedmeters](http://www.lvmwd.com/advancedmeters).

The OUTDOOR portion of the water budget is typically much larger, especially for properties with significant landscaping. Outdoor watering consists of about 70 percent of the overall water use within the District, and it is common for a customer’s overall water budget to be mostly for OUTDOOR needs. Because there is so much water used outdoors, this is where the most savings can be achieved to meet conservation requirements. Much of the savings for indoor water uses have already been achieved over the past several decades with the installation of low-flow shower heads, low-flow toilets and water-efficient appliances. Most discretionary uses of water are for outdoors. To learn more, go to [www.lvmwd.com/for-customers/water-budgets](http://www.lvmwd.com/for-customers/water-budgets).

## **5. How are water budgets calculated for commercial customers?**

The majority of water service accounts in the District are for single-family residential customers. For our commercial customers, water budgets are calculated based on an average of their past two years of use. Commercial customers generally tend to be water efficient in their practices, and they frequently have separate irrigation meters that receive OUTDOOR budgets in the same manner as described in the response to Question 4. The District is being mindful of the fact that budgets for many commercial customers are skewed right now due to the COVID pandemic and, therefore, they are under less scrutiny with regards to conservation requirements. However, these accounts are still subject to penalties for exceeding 150 percent of their water budget.

## **6. What can I do to increase my water budget?**

Go to [www.lvmwd.com/for-customers/water-budgets](http://www.lvmwd.com/for-customers/water-budgets) to fill out and submit the requested information. Please be advised that budget increases are not automatic and may need to be verified before they become effective. Due to the overwhelming number of requests to modify budgets, there is a waiting list, and it may take several weeks or more to make the adjustment, depending on the extent of the requested change. Also, please be aware that while an increase in the number of residents will increase the indoor water budget, the cost of wastewater service will also increase (wastewater service is based on the number of people in the household). Also, most water use is outdoors, so increasing the indoor water budget may have limited impact to your overall water budget, especially if you have a large property with a significant irrigated area. Adding one resident for your indoor water budget will only increase your indoor water budget by 2 units per month.

## 7. What do you mean by “my outdoor water budget has been reduced by 50%?”

Every customer has a specialized budget that is unique to the customer’s property. We are NOT asking every customer to cut back their water use by 50 percent compared to some historical amount. Rather, we are reducing every customer’s OUTDOOR water budget by 50 percent. In doing this, a specific Drought Factor is being applied to OUTDOOR water budgets.

Customers who have already taken steps to be exceptionally efficient with their OUTDOOR usage will not have to cut back as much, or perhaps at all. For example, a customer who has already been using only 60 percent of their normal OUTDOOR water budget will only have to reduce another 10 percent. In this example, if a customer’s OUTDOOR water budget is normally 10 units for a given month and would typically only use 6 units of water, the additional reduction needed would be one more unit to achieve the new OUTDOOR water budget of 5 units.

Customers who have been using up their OUTDOOR water budget, but not exceeding it, must reduce outdoor watering by 50 percent. In this example, if a customer’s OUTDOOR water budget is normally 10 units for a given month, and the customer typically used exactly 10 units of water, the reduction needed would be 5 units to achieve the new OUTDOOR water budget of 5 units.

Customers who have been exceeding their OUTDOOR water budget must reduce outdoor watering even more. For example, a customer who has been using 130 percent of their OUTDOOR water budget will need to reduce by closer to 62 percent. In this example, if a customer’s OUTDOOR water budget is normally 10 units for a given month, and the customer typically used 13 units of water, the additional reduction needed would be 8 units to achieve the new OUTDOOR water budget of 5 units.

To learn more about water budgets, visit [www.lvmwd.com/for-customers/water-budgets](http://www.lvmwd.com/for-customers/water-budgets)

Still confused or not sure? You can adjust your irrigation system by reducing the watering time by 50 percent from what you normally do and track your water use versus your budget and then adjust up or down depending on how you are doing. An example would be that if you’ve been watering for 8 minutes per

station in the summer, cut it down to 4 minutes per station. If you've been watering 4 minutes per station in the winter, cut it down to 2 minutes per station. Going to one day a week watering as of June 1 will also assist customers to stay within their outdoor budgets

### **8. How do I calculate a 50% reduction in water usage?**

Your OUTDOOR water budget is being reduced by 50 percent and you may need to cut back less or more depending on how efficiently you have been using water in the past. If you've been using more water than budgeted, you will need to reduce your water use by more than 50 percent. The information provided on your monthly water bills provides you with the numbers that you need to figure out how much you should reduce. Please see the response to Question 7 for examples.

### **9. Do the same reductions apply to recycled water accounts?**

No. Recycled water accounts are affected to a lesser extent due to the availability of the supply during most times of year. However, the OUTDOOR water budgets for these accounts have been reduced by 25 percent to minimize/eliminate the need to supplement the recycled water system with potable water during the summer months

### **10. Why do I have to cut back on water usage when I pay my water bill?**

There is a water shortage emergency and everyone needs to do their part to conserve and use water as efficiently as possible. There is not enough water to go around to meet normal demands. Customers will only be billed for the monthly readiness-to-serve charge and for the actual amount of water used. We are trying to save enough water to go around and serve the entire community for essential needs.

### **11. Why should I cut back my water use when my neighbor is always over watering?**

If your neighbor is overwatering or wasting water by allowing it to run down the gutter, you can report it to [Stopthewaste@lvmwd.com](mailto:Stopthewaste@lvmwd.com). We also have patrols provided by Dial Security that will identify and report wasteful water practices and customers will be fined after an initial warning. Also, if a customer continues to exceed 150 percent of their water budget, they will be subject to penalties and the installation of a flow restriction device.

### **12. What is a flow restriction device and why did I get a letter or e-mail notifying me that I may be subject to the installation of one?**

A flow restriction device is simply a special round plate with a small opening that is installed at the water meter serving a property. Customers receive a warning letter about the possible installation of the device if they have had two months of exceedances (used more than 150 percent of their water budget) since December 1, 2021. If a customer has had three or more exceedances, they are subject to the installation of a device in accordance with the District's Code. However, no device will be installed until at least a fourth exceedance, so customers can have more time to comply. Customers can also submit a Request for Water

Use Survey & Commitment to the Efficient Use of Water Form that can be located at [www.lvmwd.com/droughtresponse](http://www.lvmwd.com/droughtresponse). By fulfilling the requirements listed on the form, customers are provided with more time to comply.

### **13. Isn't it illegal for you to impose penalties and restrictions for water usage?**

No. The Board of Directors adopted the LVMWD Code, which permits the application of penalties and the use of a flow restriction device during a declared state of emergency. These actions are intended to encourage customers to use water more efficiently. Failure to conserve enough water Districtwide could result in a complete outdoor watering ban later this year.

### **14. What can I expect if a flow restriction device is installed?**

If installed, you will still be able to fill up a glass of water, shower (but with reduced pressure), flush toilets, run efficient dish/clothes washers, etc. However, irrigating landscapes, with the exception of low-flow drip systems, will not be possible. **Also, if your home/business has a fire suppression system, it may not function as designed.** The District does not accept any liability for damages caused by reduced flows to a property due to a customer's inability or unwillingness to comply with water conservation requirements during a declared state of emergency. **Also, please note that we are required to notify the local fire department of any properties that we install a flow restriction device and they could, at their sole discretion, deem the residence uninhabitable if it currently has a fire suppression system.**

### **15. How do I avoid having a flow restriction device installed?**

Do not exceed 150 percent of your overall water budget. The LVMWD Code permits the installation of a device after three exceedances. The District is allowing for four exceedances at this time. However, you will be granted additional exceedances if you sign and submit the Request for Water Use Survey & Commitment to the Efficient Use of Water Form located at [www.lvmwd.com/droughtresponse](http://www.lvmwd.com/droughtresponse). You can also appeal the District's decision to install a flow restriction device within 15 calendar days of being notified that you have exhausted your allowance for exceedances.

### **16. Can someone come out and help me identify ways I can be more water efficient?**

Yes. There is a long waiting list, but if you're interested in having a representative come to your property to assist you in finding ways to be more water efficient, you will need to sign and submit the Request for Water Use Survey & Commitment to the Efficient Use of Water Form that can be located at [www.lvmwd.com/droughtresponse](http://www.lvmwd.com/droughtresponse).

### **17. What can I expect my yard to look like with mandatory watering restrictions?**

Non-native landscapes and lawns can be expected to show signs of stress by wilting, yellowing or turning shades of brown. If your landscapes are not showing any signs of stress, you are likely using too much water and not complying with the conservation requirements.

**18. How can I prepare my yard for watering restrictions?**

Identify areas and vegetation that can do with less water and adjust your irrigation system accordingly. Focus more on watering trees and your favorite plants and consider letting your lawn turn brown. Consider using mulch and compost to help absorb and trap moisture in the soil around your plants. You can pick up free compost at the Rancho Las Virgenes Composting Facility – visit [www.lvmwd.com/Community-Compost](http://www.lvmwd.com/Community-Compost) for more details.

**19. I have invested thousands of dollars in landscaping, and it is going to die. Is the District going to reimburse me?**

No. With an outdoor budget reduction of 50 percent, you may lose a portion of landscaping, but some of it might just go “dormant” depending on the types of plants. Also, the District has declared a local state of emergency due to drought and a water shortage that is not within the District’s control and has implemented its [Water Shortage Contingency Plan](#), as required by law. The situation is very critical and the focus now is to conserve enough water to meet basic health and safety needs if the drought continues

**20. Why do some other places I visit in Southern California appear not to have watering restrictions?**

The District depends almost entirely on water supplies from the State Water Project (SWP) and does not have ample access to other sources of water at this time. Many other jurisdictions in the State have local supplies of water and access to other supplies such as the Colorado River. Los Angeles, eastern Ventura County and other parts of the Southern California Region are also requiring customers to conserve for the same reason. About 6.6 million Californians are being impacted with similar restrictions.

**21. How long will these restrictions be in place?**

The application of drought factors that reduce OUTDOOR water budgets and mandatory conservation will be in place until available water supplies can meet normal demands. We will need much more rain and snow before lifting the restrictions.

**22. My HOA will fine me if I let my lawn or landscaping turn brown. Can I get an exception?**

No. HOAs and any other entity, including cities and counties, are prohibited by law from assessing penalties on property owners for allowing their landscapes to brown or even die during a declared emergency. Please visit the following website for more information: [HoA Fact Sheet \(ca.gov\)](#).

**23. The fire department is telling me that I need to maintain my landscaping for a fire buffer and/or erosion control. Can I get more water budget for this purpose?**

Not at this time. The current Drought Factor of 0.5, which equates to a 50 percent reduction in the OUTDOOR water budget, should be sufficient to maintain landscaping within more critical areas of a property, albeit the vegetation will likely show signs of stress such as wilting, yellowing or turning shades of

brown. ***The District is actively seeking relief to attain more water for this purpose, but there is no guarantee at this time. The California Department of Water Resources will ultimately grant any exceptions.***

**24. I have a pool. Can I fill it up to make sure there is enough water for me to use it?**

Yes. Your pool area is calculated into your OUTDOOR water budget. Even with a 50 percent reduction in outdoor water budgets, you should be able to keep your pool full and, if not, consider the use of a pool cover to prevent evaporation and/or reduce water use in other locations. We recommend that customers defer complete emptying and refilling of pools until this emergency is over..

**25. What is the District doing to acquire more water supplies?**

The District has been working closely with its water wholesaler, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD), to identify other sources of water that can be utilized to provide additional supplies. Due to these efforts, MWD will be drawing additional water supplies from storage reservoirs to avoid a complete ban on outdoor watering if customers are able to meet the current conservation requirements. Planning efforts are underway to build additional water infrastructure to improve the District's access to other supplies and make the District less reliant on imported supplies from the State Water Project (SWP) in the future. The District is also working with its partner agency, the Triunfo Water and Sanitation District, as part of the Las Virgenes-Triunfo Joint Powers Authority to develop a new source of local, drought-resilient water supply with the Pure Water Project Las Virgenes-Triunfo (visit [www.ourpureh2o.com](http://www.ourpureh2o.com)). However, these improvements are several years away and will not help with the current water shortage emergency.