

## Lawn Watering FAQs

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### 1. **What is the Drinking Water Conservation Plan?**

The City of New Westminster as a member jurisdiction of Metro Vancouver (MV) is part of MV's Drinking Water Conservation Plan (DWCP). The DWCP, formerly the WSRP (Water Shortage Response Plan), was established in 1993 to manage the region's drinking water supply during the hot and dry summer weather when demand is highest, and has undergone several updates since then.

In 2004, the DWCP was updated in response to summer droughts, and these changes are reflected in most municipal bylaws. In 2011, to further reduce the impacts of outdoor water use on Metro Vancouver's distribution system, the DWCP was amended to restrict lawn sprinkling to mornings as this is when the least amount of evaporation occurs. If persistent drought conditions continue or a sudden disruption in water supply develops from unforeseen circumstances, the DWCP could advance to further restrictive measures, in which watering and exterior washing is heavily restricted or banned.

Following the 2015 drought, the DWCP further underwent an evaluation process that took place in two stages. First, some immediate amendments were made for the summer of 2016. Second, a broader restructuring of the DWCP took place in 2017. The two-phase review process accommodated timelines to amend and align related municipal bylaws.

### 2. **Why do we need regulations?**

Greater Vancouver experiences a lot of rainfall but most falls in autumn and winter seasons. Much of the rainfall and snowmelt in the watersheds cannot be captured for later use when dry weather arrives. Summer is when Greater Vancouver uses the most water (up to 60% more than during the rest of the year), receives the least amount of rainfall, and has the least amount of water in our reservoirs.

Watering regulations provide a fair system for water use throughout the Lower Mainland, while controlling summer water demand. By taking measures to conserve water throughout the summer, we can help to prevent more restrictive measures in the event of drought conditions.

### 3. **How much water do Metro Vancouver residents use?**

Residential water use accounts for more than half of total regional water consumption. On average, residential consumption is about 350 liters (about 77

gallons) per person per day. On a hot summer day, outdoor watering of lawns and gardens often causes consumption to double.

#### 4. **When can I water my lawn?**

Lawn watering regulations are in effect annually from May 1 to October 15.

Under Stage 1 Restrictions:

- **Residential addresses (includes townhomes and apartment buildings):**  
Even-numbered addresses: Saturday mornings from 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. if using automatic watering and from 6:00 a.m. to 9 a.m. if using manual watering.

Odd-numbered addresses: Sunday mornings from 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. if using automatic watering and from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. if using manual watering.

Watering trees, shrubs and flowers is permitted any day, from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. if using a sprinkler, or any time if hand watering or using drip irrigation.

- **Non-residential addresses**  
Even-numbered addresses: Monday mornings 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. if using automatic watering and from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. if using manual watering.

Odd-numbered addresses: Tuesday mornings 4:00 a.m. to 6 a.m. if using automatic watering and from 6:00 a.m. to 9 a.m. if using manual watering.

Watering trees, shrubs and flowers is permitted any day, from 4:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. if using a sprinkler, or any time if hand watering or using drip irrigation.

Combined mixed-use addresses (e.g. residential and commercial), follow “non-residential” watering times.

Under Stage 2 Restrictions: Lawn watering is completely banned.

For Restrictions under 3 and 4 refer to New Westminster [Water Shortage Response bylaw No. 6948, 2004](#) and/or [Metro Vancouver Drinking Water Conservation Plan Summary](#).

#### 5. **What is the difference between automatic watering and manual watering?**

According to [Metro Vancouver](#):

- Automatic watering means applying water using an automated water delivery system that requires only minimal human intervention or supervision and typically employs mechanical, electronic, or other components and devices, including but not limited to timers, sensors, computers, or mechanical appliances.
- Manual Watering - means applying water using a device or tool that is manually held or operated by a human being, without automatic watering.

**6. What is the rationale for differentiating automatic lawn watering and manual lawn watering in the restrictions?**

- Automatic lawn watering systems typically use more water than manual lawn watering and some households choose to have their automatic sprinklers on for the entire allowable period. The allowable period for automatic lawn watering was reduced to prevent excessive waste of drinking water since healthy lawns only require one hour of watering or rain per week.
- Manual lawn watering has an hour longer than automatic lawn watering to accommodate its more labor-intensive and sequential nature. To water an entire lawn manually, the watering mechanism may need to be moved around the lawn over time and the extra hour allows residents time to ensure they are maintaining a healthy lawn.

The automatic and manual lawn watering hours are staggered to ensure Metro Vancouver's water transmission system and local distribution systems can accommodate the morning peak demand while ensuring a reasonable start time for the manual watering period.

**7. Why did we reduce lawn watering to one day per week during stage 1 and completely banned during stage 2?**

This past year our region was confronted with the reality of the climate emergency and extreme weather conditions, which highlighted the need for more proactive measures to conserve the region's drinking water supply:

- Reducing lawn watering remains the most effective way to ensure we are using our drinking water wisely during summer months when demand is highest and rainfall is lowest.
- One morning per week provides adequate watering time to maintain a healthy lawn, and will achieve further water use reductions, particularly for those who tend to water their lawns for the full allowable time. Under the previous version of the plan, many lawns were overwatered when automatic sprinkling systems were set to water for both allowable days and for the full allowable time (5 hours).
- More people are using automatic sprinkling systems which leads to increased water use when they are programmed to sprinkle at every allowable opportunity.

- Healthy lawns need only an hour of watering per week, and less if it rains. With proper seasonal lawn care practices, a brown lawn will turn green again in the fall.
- Continued population growth and a changing climate are expected to increase overall water demand in the coming years.

**8. How will these changes impact businesses?**

The proposed changes to Stages 1 and 2 have little to no impacts on local businesses:

- Reducing the allowable lawn watering in Stage 1 and banning it in Stage 2 will reduce the likelihood of needing to advance to Stage 3, which has significant impacts on some local businesses;
- Business impacts in Stage 3 include restrictions on watering some areas of golf courses, and the operation of commercial car washes and commercial cleaning operations.

**9. Why did non-residential lawn watering hours change from 1:00 – 6:00 am to 4:00 – 9:00 am?**

The non-residential category includes commercial, industrial, institutional, and mixed-use residential and commercial properties. Governments, schools, and parks are a separate category with different watering restrictions that remain unchanged.

- Previously non-residential lawn watering was allowed 2 days per week; one day from 1:00 – 6:00 a.m. which was mostly for addresses that use automatic lawn watering and another day from 4:00 – 9:00 a.m. to accommodate addresses who still use manual lawn watering.
- In the revised plan non-residential lawn watering is only allowed one day per week and to accommodate the properties that use manual lawn watering the hours of 4:00 – 9:00 am are preferred.

**10. If there is a total watering ban, will my lawn die?**

Established lawns will go dormant and may turn brown during hot, dry spells. A good rainfall or cooler weather will help your lawn revive quickly. Watering lawns sparingly or not at all saves up to 17,000 liters per household over the summer months.

**11. I just installed a new lawn; can I water it outside of the allowed days/times?**

The City of New Westminster's Engineering Department issues lawn watering permits for newly established lawns at a fee. Permits can be applied for during Stage 1 and 2 restrictions. No exemption permits will be issued during Stage 2 restrictions; however, any permits issued under Stage 1 will remain valid under Stage 2. Please contact the Engineering Department at 604-527-4592 for further details.

**12. How do regulations apply to flower beds and gardens?**

For residential homes, in Stages 1 and 2 of the DWCP, gardens, shrubs, trees and flower beds can be watered by hand at any time; however if using a sprinkler, they can be done any day of the week between 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Under Stage 3, watering of vegetation must be done by hand using containers or a hand-held hose equipped with a spring-loaded shut-off. Under Stage 4, all forms of watering using drinking water are prohibited.

**13. What are some water-wise tips for lawns?**

Healthy lawns only need about 25 mm (1 inch) (depth of a tuna can) of water a week, which can easily be applied by watering once a week. Over watering can promote lawn disease and leach nutrients from the soil.

Watering early in the morning is best because less water is lost to evaporation. Use low release or natural fertilizers for long-lasting benefits. A healthy, vigorous lawn crowds out weeds and reduces pest damage. Consider natural alternatives to pesticides, herbicides and insecticides.

**14. What are some water-wise tips for gardens?**

Spread grass clippings or other mulch materials around the base of plants and shrubs. Applying organic matter (such as ground bark, sawdust or leaves) to soil increases its ability to hold water, and improves nutrient content. Mulch also prevents soil erosion and discourages the growth of weeds.

You can also plant water wise plants. By reducing lawn area or by incorporating drought-tolerant plants that need less water, gardeners can help conserve water during hot, dry summer months. Small, thick, grey or fuzzy leaves are all indicators of drought-hardy plants.

**15. Do these restrictions apply to soaker hoses or in-ground sprinkler systems?**

Yes. Any sprinkler system that is being used to irrigate a residential or commercial lawn (other than those exempted) or flower and vegetable garden is subject to these restrictions.

**16. Can my kids still play in the sprinkler?**

Yes, during allowed watering days/hours. If you run your sprinkler outside allowable days/times, you could be subject to a fine based on the current stage of the Drinking Water Conservation Plan.

Stage 1 - \$ 100.00

Stage 2 - \$ 200.00

Stage 3 - \$ 500.00  
Stage 4 - \$1,000.00

For water activities for children, it is best to use a children's play pool instead of a sprinkler. Water from the play pool can be used to water the lawn or garden areas after use.

**17. What about my car or boat -- can I wash them?**

Under Stages 1 and 2 of the DWCP, vehicle washing is discouraged and must be done using a hand-held hose equipped with a spring-loaded shut-off (which saves up to 23 liters of water per minute). Using a bucket of water will also help to conserve water. During Stages 3 and 4, the outdoor washing of vehicles is prohibited, except for safety (windows, lights and licenses only).

Washing of vehicles may not be done on a paved or hard surface, and must be done on a gravel or grass surface to ensure wash water does not enter the City's storm sewer which drains directly to local creeks. Commercial car washes are also shut down in Stage 4. All vehicles should be washed on a gravel or grass surface to avoid soapy water from going down the storm sewer, which drain into local creeks. Allowing the hose to run continuously while you are washing your vehicle is not permitted.

**18. Can I hose down my patio or other outdoor surfaces?**

Exterior washing of any surface is discouraged under Stage 1. Under stages 2 and 3 of the DWCP, outdoor surface washing is only permitted for health and safety reasons, or to prepare a surface for painting or similar treatment. Washing for aesthetic purposes is prohibited under these stages.

Under stage 4, all washing is prohibited; these restrictions also apply to private and commercial pressure washing, except if allowed by order of a regulatory authority for health and safety reasons.

**19. Why don't we just build another dam?**

Using less water during this period of high water demand keeps rates/taxes down by reducing or deferring costly system upgrades to water supply infrastructure, including dams, pipes and pumping stations. Construction of a new dam is costly, with those costs typically passed down to the municipalities and the end-user (homeowner). By being water wise, we can get a better understanding of our real water needs and help plan for future water facilities in Greater Vancouver.

**20. I pay taxes, so why can't I sprinkle my lawn whenever I want?**

New Westminister water rates/fees are some of the lowest rates amongst major urban centers in North America. The cost of building facilities so everyone can use all the water they want at any time would increase rates substantially. If we all use water efficiently, we can help keep costs down and New Westminister can spend tax dollars more efficiently.

**21. Why doesn't every house have a water meter?**

Metro Vancouver has identified water metering as a best practice, and is encouraging member municipalities to implement Universal Water Metering. A study to analyze the benefits and cost of water metering in New Westminister is underway.

**22. What is Metro Vancouver's role in Sprinkling Regulations?**

The Greater Vancouver Water District, a division within Metro Vancouver, supplies drinking water to 18 Lower Mainland municipalities. Through the DWCP, Metro Vancouver coordinates lawn sprinkling regulations (and other discretionary water uses) to ensure consistency and a sufficient supply of water across the region.

The legal authority for the regulations is retained within the [Waterworks Bylaw](#).

**23. In what other ways can I reduce water consumption?**

Simply by trying to use less water, you will contribute to the water conservation solution. There are many strategies that can reduce consumption. Here are just a few:

- Purchase a rain barrel or water conservation kit from the City of New Westminister
- A spring loaded garden hose nozzle save 23 litres per minute
- Full loads and shorter cycles in the laundry room save 95 litres per load
- Low-flow toilets save six to 14 litres per flush
- Toilet inserts save up to 100 litres per day
- Aerator and flow restrictors on the kitchen tap save up to 20 litres

**24. Where else can I get information on watering restrictions?**

City of New Westminister Engineering Department  
604-527-4592  
[engineering@newwest.ca](mailto:engineering@newwest.ca)

Metro Vancouver Information Centre  
Phone: 604-432-6200  
[www.metrovancouver.org](http://www.metrovancouver.org)

Recycling Council of BC  
Phone (lower mainland): 604-732-9253  
Phone: (throughout BC) 1-800-667-4321  
[www.rcbc.bc.ca](http://www.rcbc.bc.ca)