

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY**

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**Purpose**

San Diego County is in a semi-arid region with very limited local surface or groundwater supplies, with about 80% of its water supply for urban and agricultural purposes currently being imported. The potential for droughts in the Colorado River Basin and in California, as well as environmental limitations on the importation of Sacramento Delta water can place increasing stress on the region's water supply.

Recognizing potential limitations on imported water, the County of San Diego (County) and its regional partners have sought to develop a diversified water portfolio that includes a local, drought-proof supply of good quality water for the region. The nation's largest seawater desalination plant in Carlsbad delivers nearly 50 million gallons of fresh, desalinated ocean water to the region each day. Additionally, the County's partnership with the East County Advanced Water Purification Joint Powers Authority demonstrates the County's commitment to developing a locally derived and sustainable supply of water to reduce the region's dependency on imported water. Similarly, Pure Water San Diego is the City of San Diego's phased, multi-year program that is anticipated to provide nearly half of the City's water supply locally by the end of 2035.

The Board of Supervisors (Board) recognizes that importation of water from outside the region must be continued, and maximum use should be made of existing water supply and conveyance systems. The public health impacts and economic losses to agriculture, business, and industry resulting from the loss of imported water would be considerable and cannot be dismissed.

Under normal conditions, the San Diego region has enough local water storage capacity (assuming reservoirs are full) to supply water for at least six months to one year in an emergency. However, this available supply of water is not distributed uniformly throughout the region and some areas could run out of water sooner than others. Additionally, during prolonged periods of drought, the available supply of water in storage may be considerably less than under normal conditions.

It is important to recognize that although the County, with some exceptions, is not typically a water purveyor, it can set a positive example to others in its commitment to conservation.

In 1986, the Board established a Water Supply, Conservation, and Reclamation Policy (Policy). This Policy serves to direct and guide various water-related uses at County-owned and County-operated facilities and discretionary actions of the Board.

This Policy ensures that the County, working in concert with the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA), SDCWA member agencies, and other local jurisdictions including Eastern Municipal Water District, can provide the proper response to the growing water supply problem in a manner that aligns with County priorities for advancing equitable and sustainable programs, policies, and practices.

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Water conservation and prudent management of this scarce resource must become a way- of-life for present and future generations of County citizens. As such, the Board directed the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to initiate a Water Management Plan and Program to conserve water throughout all County-owned and County-operated facilities. Policies and action programs to achieve this goal are identified in Section I.

Because of the long-term nature of the water-scarcity concerns and the severe adverse potential consequences, it is necessary for the County to regulate water-using activities of private development projects in unincorporated areas. Therefore, Policy Section II shall apply to both public and private projects as applicable.

**Section I. Water Conservation and Reclamation in County Facilities and Parks.**

**Policy**

It is the policy of the Board that:

- a. The Director, Department of General Services (DGS) shall manage County-owned and County-operated facilities in accordance with the standards established by this policy.
- b. The Director, Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) shall operate County parks in accordance with the standards established by this policy.
- c. The goals and objectives of regional and subregional water conservation plans developed by local water authorities, water districts, and cities shall be considered by the Board and incorporated into this policy if such goals and objectives support the County's conservation priorities.

**Procedures**

1. Low-flow toilets (1.28 gal. or less), low-flow urinals (0.125 gal. or less for wall-mounted urinals) (or approved retrofit devices), and self-closing faucets for lavatories or hand-washing fixtures with a maximum flow of not more than 0.5 gallons per minute will be provided in all new County-owned and County-operated facilities, or in remodeled facilities where the remodeling includes replacement of the plumbing fixtures. Low-flow showerheads that use 2.0 gallons per minute or less at 80 psi shall be installed in new and remodeled showers. When replaced, flush valves and toilet tanks shall be modified to use the minimum amount of water practicable.
2. All sprinkler systems providing landscaping irrigation to an area of 500 square feet or larger shall be equipped with an automatic flow-control device (such as a timer or moisture sensor override unit) or other acceptable irrigation management system in accordance with CalGreen and the County

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Regulatory Code Title 8, Division 6, Chapter 7, Section 86.701 et seq. (Water Conservation in Landscaping Ordinance). Drip irrigation and/or automated irrigation management systems shall be used to the maximum extent practicable. Irrigation systems should be monitored to ensure proper performance, efficiency, and prevention of runoff that may reach storm drains and/or waterways.

3. All new landscaping installations at County-owned and County-operated facilities shall make extensive use of low-water, drought-resistant, and/or native plantings in accordance with the Water Conservation in Landscaping Ordinance, the Department of Planning & Development Services Water Efficient Landscape Design Manual (Landscape Design Manual), and Board Policy G-15, Design Standards for County Facilities and Property, or as amended.
4. Water use shall be minimized during peak electric demand periods (10 a.m. to 5 p.m. summer and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. winter). Landscape watering should be done at night or in the early morning to the extent practicable so as to minimize evaporation. Laundries should be operated at night or in the early morning.
5. Water leaks shall be reported immediately and repaired as quickly as possible.
6. DGS shall be responsible for ensuring that new and remodeled County-owned and County-operated buildings conform to water conservation requirements. DGS shall also ensure that conservation measures required by the Water Conservation in Landscaping Ordinance and the Landscape Design Manual, or as amended, are carried out in all County facilities.
7. DGS and DPR shall operate and maintain irrigation equipment and drought-resistant plantings to ensure water conservation is maximized.
8. DGS has developed the County Operations Water Conservation Plan which provides a framework and implementable measures, including those contained in this Policy, to reduce potable water use in new and existing County facilities. This plan will guide DGS water conservation efforts for County facilities.

**Section II. General Water Supply and Conservation Policies**

1. The Board shall support projects and programs that provide the citizens of the County with a long-term supply of local and imported water.

Discussion. Restoration of additional flow to the Colorado River Aqueduct from water savings in the Imperial Valley, conjunctive groundwater storage in large underground basins (outside San Diego County), and other exchanges would provide for continued use of existing imported delivery systems. Obtaining long-term storage agreements in Lake Mead and other reservoirs is a good

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example of non-structural-type solutions that would enhance the region's water supply. Similarly, projects that recharge local groundwater basins or increase the capacity of existing reservoirs would provide emergency storage capacity and make water available to the San Diego region in the event of an interruption in imported water deliveries. Such approaches might minimize environmental damage while preserving prior public investments.

The Board recognizes court decisions and public concern over potential environmental impacts to the Sacramento Delta region and upstream counties of origin, with large-scale water exports out of the area. Implementation of the Federal/State Bay-Delta Ecosystem Partnership Agreement, Federal Central Valley Project Improvement Act, construction of storage reservoirs along the SWP Aqueduct, water transfers/exchanges, and other mitigating measures will help to preserve and improve environmental conditions in the Delta. This should allow for SWP-contracted entitlements to be delivered to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) and other contractors as previously authorized by the State's voters.

2. The Board shall support development of cost-effective and environmentally- acceptable surface and groundwater storage facilities.

Discussion. These facilities are needed to conserve surplus wet-weather flows for delivery to water users during periods of peak demand. Due to the potential for disruption of both (i) the State Water Project and Colorado River Aqueducts from earthquake activity along the San Andreas and other nearby fault zones, and (ii) levee failures in the Sacramento/San Joaquin area, the Board shall support efforts of the SDCWA and MWD to develop cost-effective storage facilities located near demand areas within the County and/or away from known earthquake hazard areas.

3. The Board shall, where appropriate, require water reclamation and reuse facilities that are shown to be cost-effective as part of new projects.

Discussion. Water reclamation provides a significant source of new irrigation water to offset import demands or local water supplies for non-potable purposes. This Policy shall be carried out in concert with the County Administrative Code entitled, "Water Recycling Ordinance" (Sec. 67.501, et seq.) and the Water Quality Control Board - Region 9 adopted reclamation policies. In the event the basin in which a project is to be located has an adopted water reclamation and reuse program, the Board shall require conformance to provisions of that plan. The Board shall also support development of water repurification facilities that meet or exceed public health standards.

4. The Board, together with the SDCWA, supports necessary changes in the water right allocations that:

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- 1) Will increase San Diego County's preferential water entitlement to a level commensurate with actual use or otherwise obtain assurances that any future water shortages will be spread evenly throughout the MWD.
- 2) May provide agriculture with assurance that those who undertake conservation and/or water-reclamation programs will be entitled to an adequate water supply during water shortages unless those areas are subject to groundwater restrictions pursuant to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014, or other applicable laws, or have no ability to receive imported water from a SDCWA member agency or other jurisdictions.

Discussion. Agriculture contributes significantly to the economic diversity and well-being of the San Diego region. In the event of water shortages, agricultural water deliveries could be severely reduced.

From 2017 through 2023, agriculture in the County uses approximately 45,000 decreasing to 28,000 acre-feet of water per year for irrigation, depending on weather conditions, or about 10% decreasing to 6% of the region's total annual water use.

5. The Board shall encourage and support environmentally acceptable research and demonstration projects that utilize non-traditional water production and conservation techniques.

Discussion. Incentives are needed to encourage public and private sector research and demonstration programs in such non-traditional water development areas as brackish water treatment, repurification, desalination, weather modification, watershed management, and non-structural programs. Innovative conservation programs are also needed.

6. The Board shall direct its representatives on the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) Board and SDCWA Board to work with other local agencies in order to establish and maintain a uniform policy approach to water supply and conservation in the San Diego region.

Discussion. The SDCWA and SANDAG serve as the proper regional forum for local officials to address regional water problems. Those agencies are actively responding to assure the region's voice is heard at the State and federal levels.

7. The County will cooperate with water districts, cities, and other agencies on water issues of mutual concern, including the ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the adequacy of the regional water supply. If deemed necessary, the County will participate in efforts to improve coordination between land use approvals and the region's water supply.

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Discussion. Despite development of new sources of water and reduction in per capita consumption, the potential still exists for water demand to exceed supply.

It is important to monitor projected growth in conjunction with regional water availability. If it is determined that there is insufficient supply to meet the needs of projected growth, the rate of development might have to be slowed, and/or the types of development permitted may have to change. Since this issue involves regional facilities and supply, the County cannot act effectively on its own. While the County has land development jurisdiction over a large amount of territory in the San Diego region, a substantial percentage of new construction occurs within the cities.

Therefore, policies and procedures to regulate the allocation of water service need to be instituted on a regional basis.

The incorporated cities within the County and the County are directly responsible for making land use decisions. The SDCWA together with its members, the water suppliers, and other jurisdictions including Eastern Municipal Water District, would be the appropriate agencies to gather information on the status of the regional water supply. Coordination among these entities is needed to determine whether water supply will be sufficient to keep pace with currently projected growth, and to jointly determine appropriate land use actions in anticipation of, or in the event of, a water shortage.

8. The Board shall use its powers to ensure that local water supplies and distribution facilities are protected.

Discussion. The region has a number of dams and reservoirs that store local and imported water. The quality of the water in some of these reservoirs is threatened by encroaching urban developments. The Board shall not approve a subdivision map or development unless adequate provisions are made to protect water supply reservoirs from urban runoff.

9. The Board will incorporate water conservation requirements into the planning review process.

Discussion. To significantly reduce water waste in new development, the Board adopted an amendment to the County's Landscaping Ordinance on June 24, 2020. The County's Landscaping Ordinance is as effective as the State's Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO) which establishes water efficiency standards for new and existing landscapes. The ordinance applies to any new construction for which the County issues a building permit or a discretionary review where the aggregate landscaped area is 500 square feet or more to obtain outdoor water use authorization.

**Responsible Departments**

1. Department of General Services

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2. Department of Planning and Development Services
3. Department of Public Works
4. Department of Parks and Recreation
5. Department of Environmental Health and Quality
6. Agriculture, Weights & Measures
7. Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs
8. Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice

**Sunset Date**

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-2031.

**References**

Board Action  
 06/10/86 (163)  
 12/03/86 (7)  
 12/12/89 (49)  
 06/05/90 (43)  
 12/04/90 (56)  
 06/12/90 (120)  
 02/01/95 (23)  
 03/12/2002 (10)  
 04/07/2009 (7)  
 09/25/2012 (11)  
 11/14/2017 (16)  
 10/08/24 (xx)