

Landscape Ordinance Frequently Asked Questions – Single Family Residences

What is the purpose of the Water Conservation in Landscaping Ordinance?

The ordinance assigns an outdoor water budget to new construction. This budget is the maximum amount of water that can be used outside for the year. The ordinance also may require that an applicant for a building permit prepare a Landscape Documentation Package that must be approved by the County to ensure that the planned water use does not exceed the budget.

Does this ordinance apply to all of San Diego County?

Each of the 18 cities and the unincorporated County are required by State law to adopt a water efficient landscape ordinance. The County has updated its existing ordinance to comply with State law.

What is a water budget or Outdoor Water Use Authorization?

The State has provided a calculation to determine the maximum amount of water allowed for irrigating the landscape. The calculation is based on the climate, the size of the landscaped area, use of medium to low water using plants and an efficient irrigation system. The water budget assigned to your landscaped area by the County is also called an Outdoor Water Use Authorization.

I am a homeowner and I want to change my landscaping. Does this ordinance apply to me?

This ordinance only applies to landscapes that have received an Outdoor Water Use Authorization from the County. If your property has been assigned an authorized water budget, you may need County approval to change your landscaping. An Outdoor Water Use Authorization will be issued for all new primary, single-family home construction that applies for a building permit on or after February 12, 2010.

If your home was permitted before February 12, 2010, the ordinance does not apply to you and you do not need County approval.

I want to use well water to irrigate the landscape for my new home. Does this ordinance apply to me?

If your new home is built within the boundary of the San Diego County Water Authority (CWA) or within the Borrego Water District and any part of the home is served by a water district, the ordinance will apply.

I plan to build a home on my lot but I don't know what kind of landscaping I want. Can I wait to install the landscaping until after I've moved in?

If your new home is *not* located within the San Diego County Water Authority or the Borrego Water District, you can install your landscaping after you move in because the landscape ordinance does not apply. However there may be other regulations associated with your building permit that can affect your ability to take occupancy.

If the ordinance does apply, you are not required to install landscaping if your total landscaped area is less than 5,000 square feet (although other restrictions may apply).

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How do I find out if the home I purchased has an Outdoor Water Use Authorization?

Contact the County at 858.565.5981. This information will be made available on the County's website in the near future.

I purchased a new home from a developer and the front yard has already been landscaped. Do I need to get authorization from the County to put landscaping in the back yard?

The developer should give you information on the water budget that was assigned to your home. If the total landscaped area (front and back yards) is less than 5,000 square feet, the assigned water budget passed on to you from your developer should be more than sufficient to provide enough irrigation. You would not need to increase the assigned water budget and you do not need to contact the County. However the total landscaped area must not use more water than your assigned budget.

If the total landscaped area (front and back yards) is 5,000 square feet or more, you will need to modify the assigned water budget passed on to you by the developer and possibly modify the landscape and irrigation plans originally submitted by the developer. Please contact the County Landscape Architect for more information.

What happens if I'm not in compliance with my Outdoor Water Use Authorization?

If your outdoor water use exceeds your assigned water budget, you may be audited at your expense and/or fined.