

Final Recommendations to address Lawn Watering during Drought Conditions

A Position Paper Presented by
Lawn Watering Work Group
January 20, 2003

Background

During the summer of 2002, water utilities, municipalities and water agencies reacted to the drought conditions by implementing mandatory outdoor watering schedules and restrictions keyed to street addresses. These water conservation tools were intended to be easy for the public to understand and easy for water suppliers to implement. Shortly after implementation, confusion arose when the schedules varied from one community to the next and the media focused on one particular schedule. In some cases, schedules were incompatible with modern irrigation clocks. Finally, field staff faced additional challenges when enforcing the 3-day watering schedule because it was frequently difficult to find the address of each property to check for compliance.

The Lawn Watering Work Group is a project-oriented assembly of water conservation, water resources, water treatment and delivery professionals from most of the water suppliers from Denver to Fort Collins, as well as landscaping specialists that operate in the region. Many of the representatives from this group are members of the pre-existing Colorado WaterWise Council. This Work Group has collaborated to develop a set of recommendations for a consistent, mandatory lawn-watering schedule for communities in the northern Front Range region. The goals of these recommendations are to 1) lower water demand through wise and efficient water usage; 2) maintain as much existing turf as possible; 3) create a product that is easy for the public to understand; and 4) create a product that is easy for water suppliers to administer.

Recommendations

The Work Group's recommendations have been developed in cooperation with GreenCO, an organization that represents Colorado's professional landscaping industry. All recommendations have considered impacts on water treatment and delivery as well as likely public acceptance.

Recommendation #1:

Beginning March 15, water agencies are recommended to provide **monthly updates** that inform the public and landscape professionals about the status of voluntary and mandatory lawn watering schedules. Monthly status updates will be given on the 15th of each month, with the necessary measures to be implemented on the 1st of the following month. The Work Group suggests that public information staff from all participating water agencies coordinate the updates either by developing an information network or collaborating with an organization that will lead the effort.

Background:

Landscape professionals depend on water for their business and regular updates will allow them sufficient time to plan for appropriate landscape care in a given community. In addition, these updates will give water agencies 2 weeks to prepare information for their customers. Monthly announcements allow flexibility to water suppliers, giving them time to modify watering practices based on supply and weather conditions.

Recommendation #2:

Establish a weekly watering program that promotes a **2-day per week watering schedule** for most water customers. One day each week would either be set aside as a “catch up” day for large irrigators or special permits, or designated a non-watering day for smaller water suppliers. Customers would be assigned to irrigate on a specific day. Single family and duplex units (SF) would irrigate based on odd and even street addresses. Multi-family, homeowners’ associations or HOAs, and non-residential and other large unit or multi-unit (OTHER) properties would water on Tuesday and Friday. Each community will have a different distribution of single family/duplex and multi-unit customers. Therefore, in order to maintain a sense of regional uniformity, each water agency will need to use the overall grouping titles. Further, water agencies may need to specifically define the customers that will be included in each of the groups in order to manage even water distribution levels. The proposed schedule is shown below:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
SF _E	X	OTHER	SF _O	SF _E	OTHER	SF _O
Single Fam & Duplex Even Address	City/muni/utility, special needs, permit only, no watering	Multi-family, HOA, Non-Residential, Other	Single Family & Duplex Odd Address	Single Fam & Duplex Even Address	Multi-family, HOA, Non-Residential, Other	Single Family & Duplex Odd Address

Background:

The proposed 2-day schedule is more compatible with most irrigation clocks. Water customers would be assigned to the same day each week eliminating confusion caused by differing schedules. In addition, enforcement would be easier for field staff. This schedule is specific to turf, and does not consider special watering needs for trees and shrubs and bedding plants.

Considerations for Recommendation #2:

Recommendations on how and whether to limit the length of watering times within the two day watering schedule have been difficult to establish. The numerous variables associated with watering times have made this issue complicated. As requested at the December 10 Water Managers Meeting, the Work Group has agreed to address watering times within the 2 day weekly schedule and will produce a separate document for review.

Recommendations #3:

Prohibit watering between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Permitted watering times include Midnight to 10 a.m. and 6 to 11:59 p.m. on the assigned watering day.

Background:

Water loss due to evaporation is highest during the heat of the day. This recommendation would reinforce a common-sense water conservation practice for the public while being considerate of customers with hoses and manual sprinklers who want to water their lawns in the evening.

Implementation

Implementation and enforcement of these or any other recommendations will be the responsibility of each participating water agency.

Lawn Watering Work Group

Representatives from the Rocky Mountain Chapter AWWA Conservation Committee and Colorado WaterWise Council Members met in February 2002 to 1) discuss the possibility of collaborating on a unified media campaign to promote water conservation because all meeting participants were served by the same media sources and 2) to discuss updating the 20-year-old circle, diamond, square watering schedule. By mid-spring, the meeting members became more project-oriented, focusing on updating the 3-day watering schedule. By the end of the summer, members recognized the incompatibilities of the 3-day watering schedule, and looked to identify other schedules that performed better. In October, the members met for an all day workshop forming a collaborative Work Group to develop a new watering schedule, taking into consideration everything that had been learned over the past year.

Work Group members include:

(in alphabetical order)

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