



Understand laws and ordinances

For more than 25 years, the Southern Nevada Water Authority has been taking actions to respond to the drought and prepare for potential water cuts. One of the SNWA's largest efforts is implementing aggressive conservation initiatives to reduce our community water use.

Grass restrictions

Replacing useless grass

A [law enacted by the Nevada Legislature in 2021](#) will prohibit the use of Colorado River water delivered by Water Authority member agencies to irrigate nonfunctional grass, beginning in 2027.

The law applies to Southern Nevada commercial, multi-family, government and other properties. It does not apply to grass in single family residences, such as grass in front and back yards.

Cutting back on this grass in our valley will reduce Southern Nevada's [Colorado River](#) consumption and protect our community's water supply.

The [Water Authority Board of Directors](#) established a [citizens advisory committee](#) to help the Water Authority implement the new law. Its activities included defining what constitutes "nonfunctional" grass. [View the Nonfunctional Turf Removal Advisory Committee's recommendations report.](#)



THIRST QUENCHERS: Nevada's nonfunctional grass law and alternatives

Southern Nevada Water Authority



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 **Listen to the full podcast:** [THIRST QUENCHERS: Nevada's nonfunctional grass law and alternative grasses help protect community's water supply.](#)

Commercial, multi-family, and government property owners may apply for the Water Smart Landscapes rebate, which gives cash for grass removed and replaced with desert landscaping. **PLUS get a \$100 bonus for every new tree installed!**

Get a Rebate

Definitions

Nonfunctional turf

Functional turf

Nonfunctional turf

An irrigated grass area not providing functional use. Areas of nonfunctional turf include, but are not limited to:

- **Streetscape turf**
Grass located along public or private streets, streetscape sidewalks, driveways and parking lots, including turf within a community, park and business streetscape frontage areas, medians, and roundabouts.
 - **Frontage, courtyard, interior and building-adjacent turf**
Grass in front of, between, behind or otherwise adjacent to a building or buildings located on a property not zoned exclusively for single-family residence, including maintenance and common areas.
 - **Certain HOA-managed landscape areas**
Turf managed by a homeowner association that does not provide a recreational benefit to the community or that otherwise does not qualify as functional turf, regardless of property zoning.
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Frequently asked questions about the law

Why is removing this grass a priority?

Water is a limited resource in our desert community, so conservation is a priority for everyone who lives here. Low water levels at Lake Mead have caused federally-declared water shortage conditions on the Colorado River, reducing the amount of water Southern Nevada can withdraw from Lake Mead. Combined with additional water reductions outlined in the [Drought Contingency Plan](#), the declared shortage will cut Southern Nevada's annual water allocation by nearly 7 billion gallons in 2024. This is enough water to serve more than 40,000 households for a year.

Does this mean you'll show up at my house to remove my grass?

No. The legislation doesn't include single-family residential homes that have grass in the back or front yard. We estimate that approximately 1,000 acres of nonfunctional turf remains at residential properties—primarily front-yard grass. However, we encourage residents to voluntarily convert any unused grass to drip-irrigated, desert-friendly plants and trees, and we offer a cash incentive to help offset those costs.

What about grass that is used by the community, like in parks and at schools?

We support the continued use of grass for recreational activities (organized sports, exercise, picnicking, etc.). We estimate there are about 7,600 acres of grass used for these purposes in the Las Vegas valley – in parks, schools, and sports fields.

What does the legislation include?

The legislation prohibits the use of Colorado River water to irrigate nonfunctional turf on properties that are not zoned exclusively for single-family residences after Jan. 1, 2027. It called for the formation of a Nonfunctional Turf Removal Advisory Committee which provided community input and feedback from stakeholders affected by the proposal and made recommendations to the SNWA board of directors. The five-year timeline between the legislation's passage and the deadline for turf removal will ensure the community can transition to water efficient landscaping with opportunities for community input and feedback.

What is the Nonfunctional Turf Removal Advisory Committee and where can I find its recommendations report?

In June 2021, the Nevada Legislature directed the Water Authority Board to develop a plan for the removal of nonfunctional turf in the Las Vegas Valley. The Legislature also created the Nonfunctional Turf Removal Advisory Committee to be appointed by the Southern Nevada Water Authority Board of Directors to help the Water Authority develop its plan for removal of nonfunctional turf. The Southern Nevada Water Authority Board approved the [Nonfunctional Turf Removal Advisory Committee's recommendations report](#) in January 2022.

Grass helps cool outdoor areas in the valley. It's attractive. And my dog likes it!

Desert plants, including canopy trees and flowering bushes, are great for shading and cooling outdoor areas. On a hot summer day, you see more people sitting in the shade than in the middle of the grass. Tree canopies and plants shade sidewalks, buildings and rock ground coverings, helping reduce heat absorption while using less water than grass. Not to mention, bees love and need flowering desert plants! Grass doesn't need to be replaced solely with rocks and cacti. In fact, there are great examples throughout our valley of lush desert landscaping that is as beautiful as it is practical for our climate (and our dogs). By the way, if you're looking for inspiration, visit the [Springs Preserve](#) or check out our [list of recommended plants](#).

Does grass help urban heat islands?

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If the drought is that serious, why not limit growth and new development?

SNWA is responsible for ensuring our community’s water needs are met. To do this, we maintain a 50-year water resource plan that accounts for population projections and pairs the necessary resources to meet water demands over the next half-century. While Southern Nevada has a limited water supply from the Colorado River, we use it very efficiently by recycling and safely returning all indoor water use back to Lake Mead. Every gallon returned allows us to take another gallon out of the lake, treating it to safe drinking water standards. So, indoor water use has little to no impact on the amount of water our community depletes from the lake.

Water used outdoors is only used once, and not returned to Lake Mead. Reducing outdoor water use provides the greatest water savings. Replacing nonfunctional grass with drip-irrigated desert plants saves water without affecting our community’s quality of life.

**"Stop the building! Stop the resorts! Stop the golf courses! **

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What about golf courses?

It is a common misperception that [golf courses](#) (along with resorts) use large amounts of the community's water, primarily due to the high visibility of these sectors. In reality, golf courses use 5 percent of our area's water, compared to 60 percent used by residents.

Several important actions have been taken to reduce golf course water use over the past two decades. First, every course in Southern Nevada is subject to strict water budgets, and high penalties are levied for exceeding them—up to nine times the top-tier water rate.

Many local golf courses have participated in the Southern Nevada Water Authority's program for converting grass to desert landscape, even using GPS-equipped golf balls to determine areas of courses that never saw play and could be removed. A major strategy used by golf courses to manage their water use is removing turf from non-playing areas outside the fairways and on driving ranges. A water savings of 55 gallons per square foot is realized for areas converted from turfgrass to drip-irrigated desert landscapes. Since 1999, 30 local golf courses have removed more than 900 acres of grass.

Tap the Truth: Golf Course Water Use

Southern Nevada Water Authority



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What about resorts?

Resorts consume 7 percent of our community's water supply – that's the water that is only used once and not recycled. In addition, new resorts are required to submit water efficiency plans to encourage efficient water management practices. Viewed from the state level, the resort sector uses less than one-tenth of one percent of Nevada's water supply, while employing about 16 percent of the state's workforce.

Tap the Truth: Las Vegas Strip ¹

Southern Nevada Water Authority



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Why do other states like California and Arizona get to use more water than Nevada does?

In 1922, the seven states that share the Colorado River signed the Colorado River Compact, which apportions water from the river to the states. The compact was established almost a century ago, when Nevada had a very small population, and renegotiating this agreement would likely result in protracted litigation. The Southern Nevada Water Authority is pursuing more timely partnerships with these seven states designed to ensure cooperation, prevent litigation and ensure efficient use of Colorado River water.

For example, the SNWA is exploring a partnership with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California in which the Authority would invest in a large-scale water recycling program. In return, SNWA would be able to access additional water supplies of California's share of the Colorado River.

Tap the Truth: Nevada's Portior

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Waiver requests

Non-Single-Family Residential (Business, HOA, Multi-Family)

Any establishment may apply for a waiver for functional turf that provides a recreational benefit to the community and meets the functional turf definition.

Waiver applications must demonstrate that the turf substantially complies with the functional turf definition as indicated by:

- Activity type
- Activity-appropriate dimensions
- Number of persons served and frequency of use
- Location in proximity to similar turf areas
- Public access and proximity to roadways
- Presence of facilities and/or other recreational amenities Irrigation efficiency

Waiver requests must be submitted using an online form. To request the form, or if you have questions about functional vs. nonfunctional grass, please call [702-862-3740](tel:702-862-3740).

Single-Family Residential (Homeowner)

If you are the property owner of a single-family residential property with non-functional grass, you may be eligible for a waiver. Waiver forms for single-family properties are provided via direct mail. To request a waiver form, please call [702-862-3760](tel:702-862-3760).

Prohibiting installation of new grass

In December 2021, the Southern Nevada Water Authority Board of Directors approved a resolution to prohibit the installation of irrigated grass in new commercial and residential developments. Grass will still be permitted in schools and parks for community use, as well as cemeteries. The prohibition of grass in new developments will save approximately 27,000 acre-feet of water over the coming decades.

Prohibiting grass in front and backyards of new residential developments reduces the impact of growth on our community's water supply, helping ensure any new residential developments do not affect water supplies for existing homes and businesses. Local jurisdictions have adopted rule and code changes to implement new turf restrictions.

The grass prohibition applies to the front and backyards of new residential developments, including HOAs, neighborhood developments, community associations, master-planned communities built by developers, and individual custom homes built by property owners.

Pool restrictions

Limiting residential pool sizes

The Southern Nevada Water Authority approved a resolution in July 2022 that supports a 600-square-foot surface area limit on new residential pools. Local jurisdictions also approved this change with rule and code changes.

This measure will help reduce consumptive water use associated with evaporative water loss, targeting savings from the top 25 percent of new pools constructed.

While the average size swimming pool in Southern Nevada is about 475 square feet, the new pool size limits will prevent large-scale, water-intensive residential swimming pools. The measure is expected to save more than 32 million gallons over the next 10 years.

[Get Pool Tips](#)

Evaporative cooling restrictions

Moratorium on evaporative cooling

The Southern Nevada Water Authority Board of Directors voted to pass a resolution supporting a moratorium on the installation and use of evaporative cooling mechanisms in new commercial and industrial buildings in the Las Vegas Valley. This restriction does not apply to single-family homes. Evaporative cooling mechanisms are highly water intensive and are Southern Nevada's second largest consumptive use of water, exhausting nearly 10 percent of Southern Nevada's Colorado River allocation annually.

Local jurisdictions are adopting and enacting this measure into regulatory codes, ordinances, and policies.

Alternative cooling technologies are available that are less water intensive, and the Southern Nevada Water Authority offers incentives to replace evaporative cooling.

[Get a Water Efficient Technology Rebate](#)

Use evaporative cooling? Earn up to 50% in cash incentives

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Water waste ordinances

Review the ordinances for your area below, and if you see water waste, be sure to report it to your water service provider.

Boulder City

- [Section 9-8-17–Waste of water prohibited](#)

Clark County

- [Chapter 24.30–Waste of water from public water system](#)
- [Chapter 24.34–Water use restrictions](#)
- [Title 30–Comprehensive Development Code](#)

City of Henderson

- [Section 14.14.020–Water waste](#)
- [Chapter 14.14–Conservation](#)

City of Las Vegas

- [Section 14.08–Water Regulations](#)
- [Section 14.08.040–Waste of Water Designated](#)
- [Section 14.11 Drought Plan](#)
- [Las Vegas Valley Water District Service Rules](#)

City of North Las Vegas

- [Section 13.08.040–Wasting water: penalty](#)
- [Section 13.08.030–Waste of water unlawful](#)
- [Section 13.08–Water conservation and drought](#)

Stop Water Waste

Other conservation restrictions

Vehicle and surface washing

Water restrictions limit the washing of vehicles and prohibit or restrict surface building and equipment washing.

Vehicle washing

Personal vehicles may be washed at residential properties once a week per vehicle and requires a positive shut-off nozzle on the garden hose. There is no limitation on how often you can wash your vehicle if the guidelines for commercial vehicles are followed or a high-pressure, low-volume sprayer is used.

Commercial vehicle washing is prohibited except where water is captured to a sanitary sewer through approved methods or where a high-pressure, low-volume sprayer using less than 10 gallons per vehicle is used.

Mobile car washing is allowed if the company uses a high-pressure, low-volume sprayer and less than 10 gallons of water per vehicle. We also recommend you use a [Water Smart Car Wash](#).

Surface, building, and equipment washing

The washing of surfaces, buildings and equipment is prohibited unless water is discharged to a sanitary sewer through approved methods or contained on site. This includes surface washing by restaurants and fast food chains.

Fountains and water features

All fountains and water features using water provided by an SNWA member agency are subject to the water restrictions below. This includes the use of water that has been recycled or reprocessed by the customer.

Single-family residences can have fountains and water features with a surface area of less than 10 square feet.

New fountains and water features are prohibited for commercial use, with the following exemptions:

- Fountains and water features supplied by privately-owned water rights
- Indoor water features or features with most the total water volume contained indoors or underground
- Recreational water parks, both public and private
- Fountains or water features necessary to sustain aquatic animals, if such animals are of significant value and have been actively managed within the water feature prior to declaration of drought

Mist systems

Residential mist systems are allowed under water restrictions, but each jurisdiction has regulations limiting commercial use to certain months and times of day. Contact your local water provider for specific information.

Golf courses

Golf courses are subject to annual water budgets with appropriate surcharges applied to any water used over the budgeted amounts. Surcharges are assessed on an annual basis and are in addition to the price paid for water. Courses that go over their water budget have significant financial penalties assessed to the excess water use. In January 2023, the Las Vegas Valley Water District approved a reduction in golf course water budgets from 6.3 acre-feet of water per acre annually to 4 acre-feet effective in 2024. The other SNWA member agencies will also enact this change for golf courses in their service areas.

Golf courses are water-budgeted based upon acre-feet of water (including potable, raw, reclaimed and recycled water) for each acre currently being irrigated. The irrigated acreage includes lakes and ponds existing within a golf course and lakes and ponds serving, in total or in part, as a golf course irrigation reservoir. Once measured, the irrigated acreage shall remain fixed, thus creating incentive for golf courses to convert unneeded turf to other styles of water-efficient landscaping. If a golf course expands its course by increasing the number of playing holes, a new irrigated acreage will be determined.

Homeowners associations

Most government jurisdictions in the Las Vegas Valley have laws that prevent a homeowners' association (HOA) from restricting the installation of a water-saving landscape. An HOA may require homeowners to submit landscape design plans for approval; however, the HOA cannot require a homeowner to install grass nor can it prohibit water-efficient landscapes. An HOA may restrict the use of some types of landscape materials, such as artificial turf. To avoid problems,

review all appropriate HOA policies that may apply to your new landscaping project before proceeding.

Note: Restrictions may vary based on individual jurisdictions. Contact your [local water provider](#) for specific information.

A Not-For-Profit Water Agency

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