

Drought rule changes coming later this summer – but why?

Whether you’re new to San Antonio or a long-time resident, you probably know our region is prone to drought. Sometimes we’re lucky and get great summer rains. But that certainly hasn’t been the case in the past few years.

2024 marks the fifth year in a row of below-normal Edwards Aquifer recharge, and three straight years of drought watering rules.

“Managing through this drought has been intense and challenging,” said Karen Guz, SAWS vice president of conservation. “But it’s also given us perspective on what works and where we can improve.”

Guz said targeted water savings of just 10% were not met over the last two years.

“The good news is most people follow the once-per-week lawn watering rules,” Guz said. “By making some reasonable adjustments to our drought plan we can increase savings and reduce the chance of stricter rules in the future.”

Making drought rules more fair

Using City of San Antonio citations to enforce drought rules has unfairly left some residents outside their reach.

“SAWS customers who live in suburban cities or otherwise outside San Antonio’s jurisdiction are not subject to the watering rules today,” Guz said. “We need everyone’s help to save water during drought.”

To close this gap, SAWS plans to make the rules part of its Utility Service Regulations. This will ensure all SAWS customers follow the same rules, regardless of where they live. It will also allow violation charges to be put on the SAWS bill rather than requiring a court appearance.

What are the new violation charges?

The first charge for a single family or small commercial site will still be \$137. For a first-time violation, this fee can be waived by taking a one-hour course online. Subsequent charges are higher to discourage repeat violations. The charges will also be much higher for sites that use one million gallons or more per year for irrigation.

How can someone challenge the violation?

Customers will be able to review the violation before any charge is put on their SAWS bill.

“A call to SAWS will result in a review of the evidence,” Guz said. “This will include a date/time-stamped photo, GPS maps and notes from the trained enforcement staff, and a review of electronic meter data, if available.”

Customers not satisfied by this review can escalate to a committee of non-SAWS employees appointed by the SAWS Board, “to ensure enforcement is fair and consistent,” Guz said.

The new rules and charges are expected to take effect in July.

Your bill and the new drought rule charges

While the proposed drought rule changes are designed to encourage compliance and stewardship of our supplies, exactly how much your own bill might change will depend on your household’s water use and other factors.

The charts on pages 2 and 3 show how the proposed rates may affect customer bills in different stages of drought. To learn more about how your own bill could be affected by the new charges, visit wateringrules.com.

More rates information inside

PUBLIC NOTICE

DECLARATION OF INTENT TO CHANGE WATER AND IRRIGATION RATES AND IMPLEMENT NON-COMPLIANCE CHARGES



Implementation of new non-compliance charges and drought surcharges effective for consumption on or after July 6, 2024, is hereby declared.

Consistent with the public notification procedures of Chapters 11 and 13 of the Texas Water Code, Titles 16 and 30 of the Texas Administrative Code and applicable city regulations, the San Antonio Water System Board of Trustees announces its intent to implement a new non-compliance charges and drought surcharges for advanced stages of drought. The new charges, as proposed by SAWS staff, were presented to the SAWS Board of Trustees on May 7, 2024, for a recommendation to City Council.

The proposed non-compliance charges and drought surcharges are currently scheduled for review and

consideration by San Antonio City Council on June 13, 2024 (please monitor the City Council agenda for any changes in the schedule). A customer may participate in the process at the City Council meeting. Upon approval by City Council, the proposed 2024 charges will become effective for consumption on or after July 6, 2024. The charges will also be incorporated into SAWS' water conservation and drought contingency plans.

The charges below and on page 3 represent samples of current and proposed billing amounts for different levels of consumption across various customer classes.

More information is available at 210-704-SAVE (7283) or wateringrules.com.

Para información en español, por favor lláme al 210-704-7283.

Drought Surcharge

Drought Surcharges are not applied unless a customer's billed use achieves the volumetric thresholds shown. While the rate remains the same in Stage 3 and Stage 4, there are different thresholds in each stage such that the surcharge is incurred sooner in Stage 4 drought conditions than in Stage 3 drought conditions.

Drought Surcharge Rate Structure				
Customer Class	Rate Per Thousand Gallons	Meter Size (inches)	Stage 3 Threshold (gallons)	Stage 4 Threshold (gallons)
Residential	\$10.37	All Sizes	20,000	12,000
Billed Commercial Irrigation	\$10.37	5/8	12,000	7,200
		3/4	18,000	10,800
		1	30,000	18,000
		1.5	60,000	36,000
		2	96,000	57,600
		3	210,000	126,000
		4	360,000	216,000
		6	810,000	486,000
		8	1,080,000	648,000
		10	1,440,000	864,000

Drought Surcharge Examples

Customer Class	Consumption (gallons)	Assumed Meter Size (inches)	Existing Surcharge Rate	Proposed Rate Per Thousand Gallons	Change (\$)
All Residential	5,000	All	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
	10,000		\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
	20,000 (Stage 3)		\$0.00	\$10.37	\$10.37
	12,000 (Stage 4)		\$0.00	\$10.37	\$10.37
All Billed Commercial Irrigation	5,000	1	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
	10,000	1	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
	30,000 (Stage 3)	1	\$0.00	\$10.37	\$10.37
	18,000 (Stage 4)	1	\$0.00	\$10.37	\$10.37

Non-Compliance Charge

The application of a Non-Compliance Charge is strictly based on whether a customer violated the drought rules. Violations must be documented and observed by trained enforcement personnel. There are separate rates for large users and small users. Large users are characterized by having been billed one million gallons or greater in the previous year. Small users are those customers that have been billed for less than one million gallons of use in the previous year. There are also different rates depending on the number of violations incurred by the customer as repeated non-compliance with the rules impacts the community's water supply.

Non-Compliance Charge Rate Structure		
Violation Number	Small Users (less than 1 million gallons)	Large Users (more than 1 million gallons)
1st Violation	\$137.00	\$500.00
2nd Violation	\$225.00	\$625.00
3rd+ Violation	\$500.00	\$1,250.00

Non-Compliance Charge Examples

Customer Class	Violation Number	Consumption (gallons)	Assumed Meter Size (inches)	Existing Rate	Proposed Rate		Change (\$)	
					Small Users (less than 1 million gallons)	Large Users (more than 1 million gallons)	Small Users (less than 1 million gallons)	Large Users (more than 1 million gallons)
All	1	5,000	N/A	\$0.00	\$137.00	\$500.00	\$137.00	\$500.00
	2				\$225.00	\$625.00	\$225.00	\$625.00
	3				\$500.00	\$1,250.00	\$500.00	\$1,250.00
	1	10,000			\$137.00	\$500.00	\$137.00	\$500.00
	2				\$225.00	\$625.00	\$225.00	\$625.00
	3				\$500.00	\$1,250.00	\$500.00	\$1,250.00

Drip Irrigation rule changes

Drip irrigation has exploded in popularity over the past few years – not surprising since current Stages 1 and 2 rules allow drip to be used every day.

That's a problem because drip can use more water than people think.

SAWS is still working with the community to determine the final rules on drip irrigation. Those rules will be voted on by both the SAWS Board of Trustees and San Antonio City Council.





Flip-flopping from flash flooding to drought is hard on landscapes. Learn to create a garden that thrives either way and benefits wildlife and ecosystems during **Rainscaping and Rain Gardens** at San Antonio Botanical Garden, Saturday, June 29. Tickets at sabot.org/events.

Event Calendar

Bat Talk and Walk

June 7

Government Canyon State Natural Area
12861 Galm Road
tpwd.texas.gov/calendar

Wellness at the Tobin: Drum Circle

June 15

Tobin Center
100 Auditorium Circle
tobincenter.org/wellness

Botanical Print Workshop

June 20

San Antonio Botanical Garden
555 Funston Place
sabot.org

Guided Bird Tour

June 23

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center
10750 Pleasanton Road
mitchelllake.audubon.org



Customer Service and 24-hour Emergency

210-704-SAWS (7297)
saws.org/waternews

The (watering) times, they are a-changin'

Watering hours in Stage 2 have been 7-11 a.m. and 7-11 p.m. for over five years and people have gotten used to them. So why is SAWS proposing a change?

One reason: many people have expressed a desire to water earlier in the morning.

Another reason is energy use. Those evening watering hours of 7-11 p.m. happen to coincide with peak power demand for the Texas power grid. CPS Energy has asked energy-intensive customers like SAWS to help shift power use to a different time.

With that in mind, the new proposed watering times for Stage 2 will be 5-10 a.m. and 9 p.m. to midnight on your day.

While people with automatic irrigation have found this proposal positive, there have been concerns by hose-end sprinkler users who don't want to drag a garden hose around in the dark. Good news: those customers may request a variance from SAWS to water earlier in the evening from 7-10 p.m.

KNOW YOUR DAY

M	T	W	TH	F
0	2	4	6	8
1	3	5	7	9

LAST DIGIT OF ADDRESS


MORNINGS

5-10 AM

~~7-11 AM~~

NEW PROPOSED WATERING TIMES

STAGE 2



EVENINGS

9 PM - MIDNIGHT

~~7-11 PM~~

WATER ONCE A WEEK

New Stage 3 watering rules proposed

San Antonio has been under Stage 2 watering rules for more than two years. Unfortunately, the Edwards Aquifer is not expected to recover this summer. That means even more pumping cutbacks are expected, along with the need to further reduce water demand.

SAWS has never imposed its current Stage 3 rules, which would limit landscape watering to only twice a month. While plants can survive on that amount of water, it is a measure we'd like to avoid.

With that in mind, new Stage 3 rules are being proposed.

The revised Stage 3 would continue to allow once-a-week watering on your day, but would add a high use surcharge. It would also take

effect automatically when the Edwards Aquifer drops to Stage 3 levels.

For single family accounts, the \$10.37 surcharge per thousand gallons would take effect once a 20,000 gallon monthly threshold is met. Customers using less than that (water and sewer bill below \$200) – 95% of all residential accounts – would not be affected at all. The threshold for commercial irrigation would vary by meter size.

The surcharge would encourage both residential and commercial customers with very high outdoor use to conserve.

What about that twice-per-month watering rule? That would be pushed to Stage 4, which would be declared only if enough savings cannot be achieved in other ways.