

October 6, 2025

SAWS Irrigation Plan Program Update

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Manager-Conservation Enforcement Programs



Today's Topics

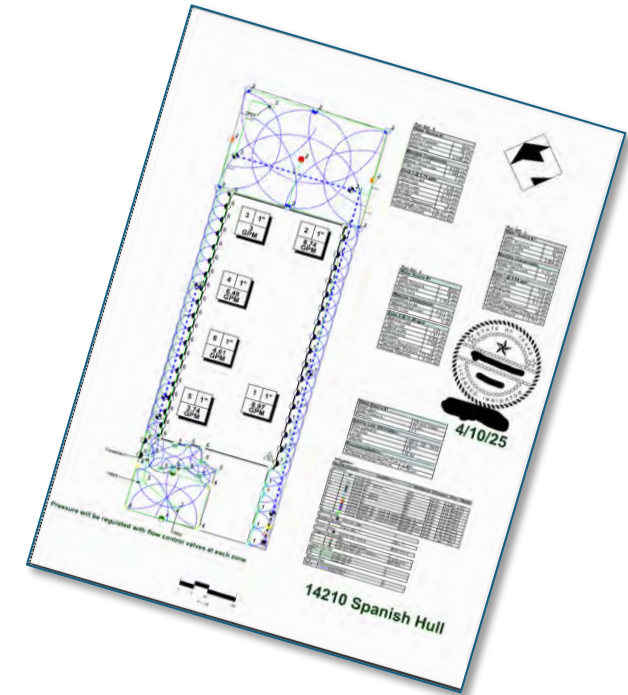
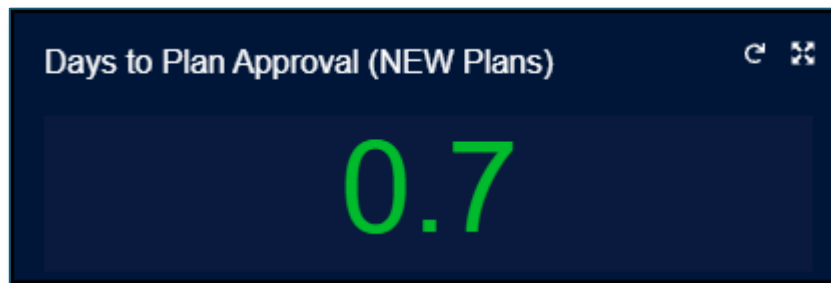
- Plan Review Status Update
- Account and Landscape Variance Holds
- Operational Irrigation Inspections
- Soil Inspection Component
- Irrigation Installation Reminders



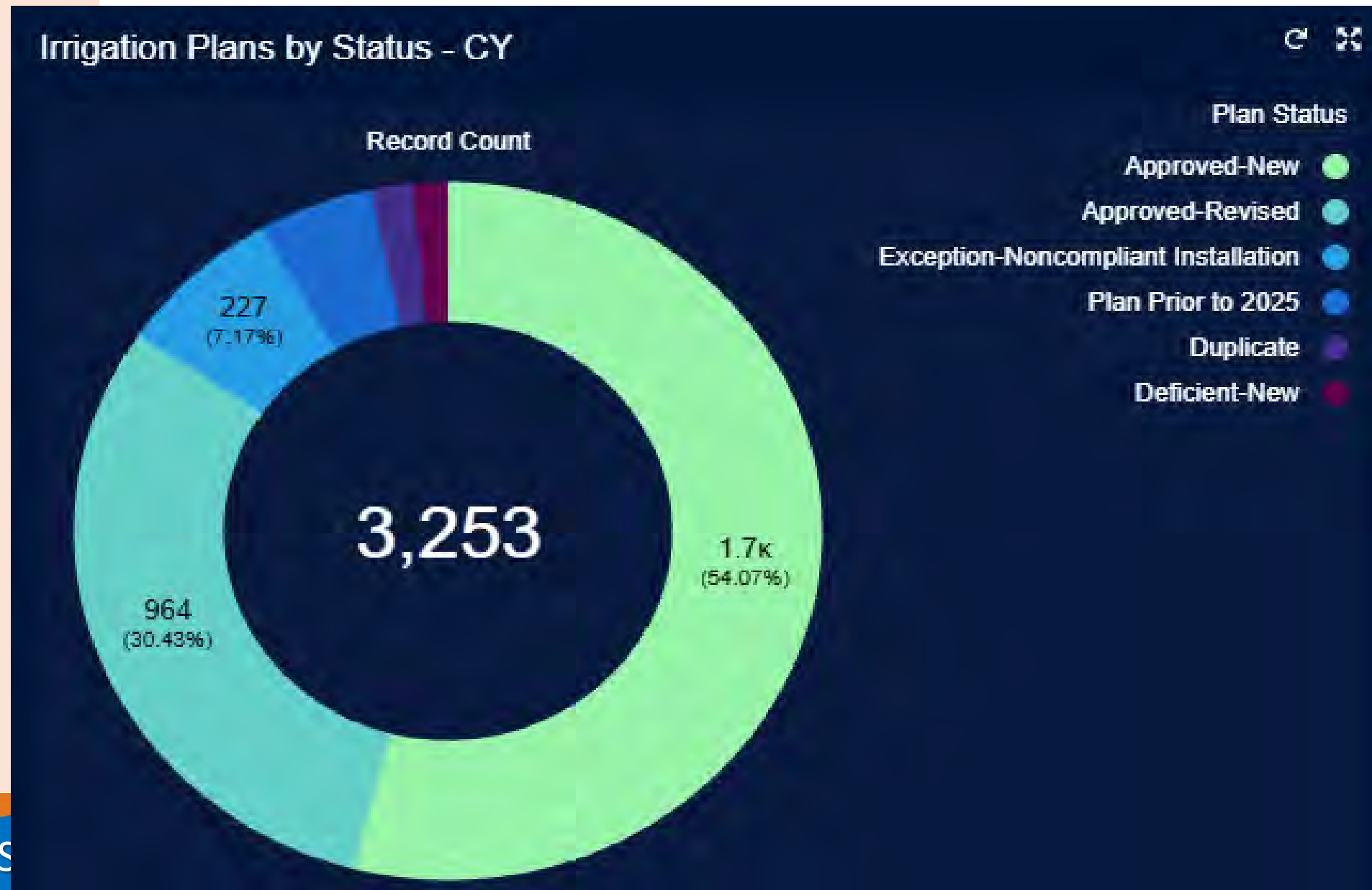
SAWS Plan Review Program

Where are we?

- SAWS adds six new staff; TCEQ-licensed Irrigation Inspectors, Licensed Irrigators on staff.
- Plan review began in 2025 for new irrigation systems installed after 1/1/25.
- Plan review will require up to 5 business days**
- ** Current plan review metric (as of 10/6/25):



9 months in...how are we doing?





Current Issues

Irrigators Not Planning Ahead

- Plans being submitted AFTER the irrigation system is already constructed.
 - Plans must be created and submitted before construction.
 - Post-installation plans with deficiencies are being identified as a “Noncompliant Installation” in 2025.
 - In 2026, these types of sites will have to repair deficiencies in order to pass inspection.
- Plans being submitted for RES irrigation systems larger than 10,000 sf. (SAWS USB/Ord-6/20/2024)
 - Landscapes can be as large as desired, but only 10,000 sf can be irrigated.

Hold Up! Account transfers and variances

Plan and Inspection Requirement is in SAWS USRs

- Accounts where a deficient plan is submitted are placed into a hold (Alert 112).
 - Hold prevents account transfer until an approved irrigation plan is on file.
- Variance requests on accounts without a plan placed on hold and the Alert 112 added.



Operational Inspections – Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice inspection appointments available NOW

- Take systems with approved plans and run an operational inspection. Goal=30 mins
 - Controller (sticker, warranty papers, manual, TCEQ statement)
 - In-Ground (includes soil evaluation, proper wiring, proper valves, etc)
 - Operations (pressure check, proper spacing and precip rate)
- Inspection Checklist available online

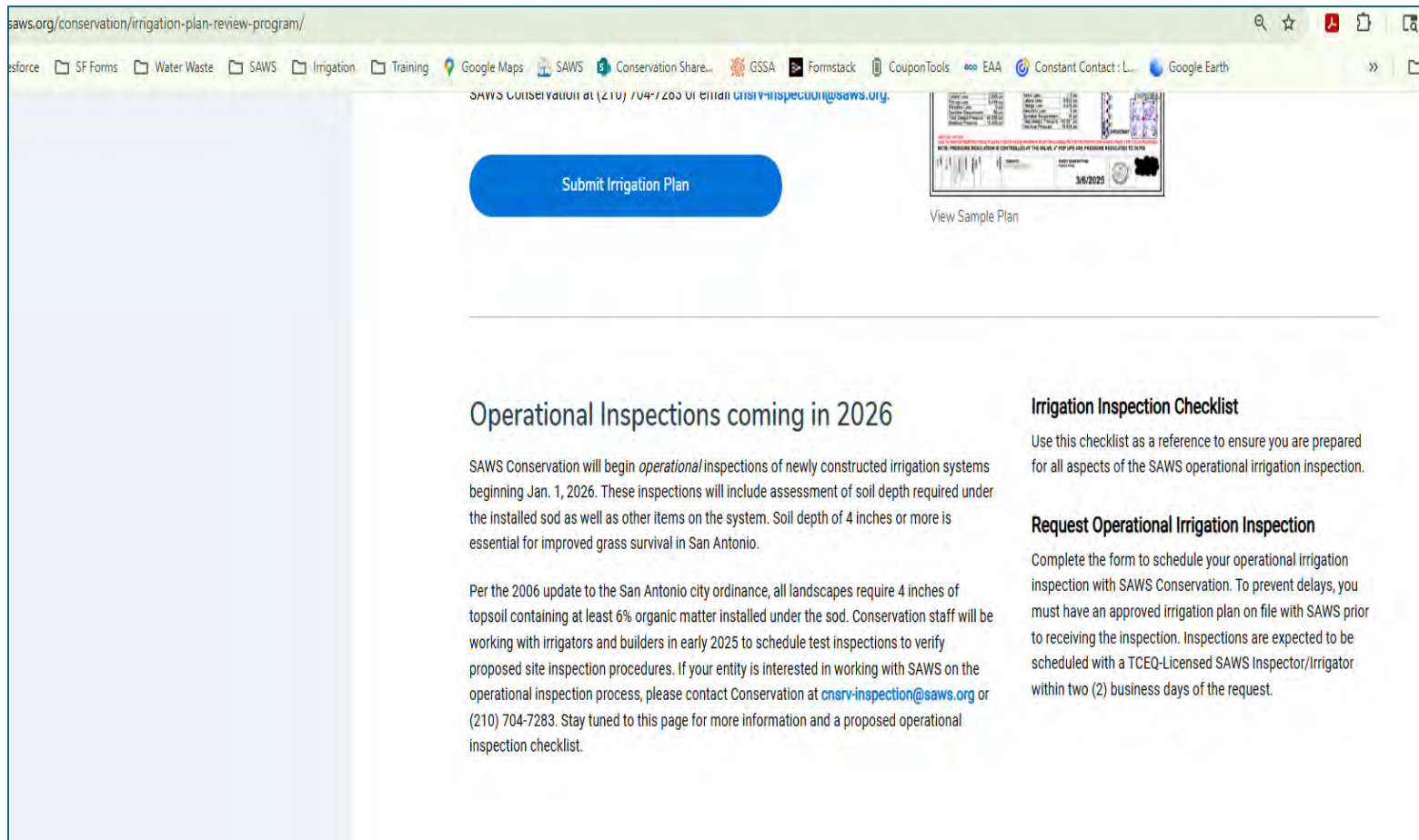
CoSA Permits and Inspection = C of O

SAWS Plan Review and Inspection = Release account/variance holds



Operational Inspections

Request inspections at www.saws.org/irrigation-plan



saws.org/conservation/irrigation-plan-review-program/

Submit Irrigation Plan

View Sample Plan

Operational Inspections coming in 2026

SAWS Conservation will begin *operational* inspections of newly constructed irrigation systems beginning Jan. 1, 2026. These inspections will include assessment of soil depth required under the installed sod as well as other items on the system. Soil depth of 4 inches or more is essential for improved grass survival in San Antonio.

Per the 2006 update to the San Antonio city ordinance, all landscapes require 4 inches of topsoil containing at least 6% organic matter installed under the sod. Conservation staff will be working with irrigators and builders in early 2025 to schedule test inspections to verify proposed site inspection procedures. If your entity is interested in working with SAWS on the operational inspection process, please contact Conservation at cnsv-inspection@saws.org or (210) 704-7283. Stay tuned to this page for more information and a proposed operational inspection checklist.

Irrigation Inspection Checklist

Use this checklist as a reference to ensure you are prepared for all aspects of the SAWS operational irrigation inspection.

Request Operational Irrigation Inspection

Complete the form to schedule your operational irrigation inspection with SAWS Conservation. To prevent delays, you must have an approved Irrigation plan on file with SAWS prior to receiving the inspection. Inspections are expected to be scheduled with a TCEQ-Licensed SAWS Inspector/Irrigator within two (2) business days of the request.



Operational Inspections

- In 2026, must pass plan review AND operational inspection before holds are lifted.
- Goal: complete operational inspection within 2 business days of request if approved plan is on file.
- Staff: 12 field investigators + other licensed Conservation Staff if needed. We are committed to completing operational inspections efficiently.



Soil Evaluation

- As of 1/1/2006, turfgrass must have at least 4" of soil support in new construction.
- Soil is the gas tank for the grass...holding water between irrigation/rain events.
- Evaluation Steps
 - Check for soil depth
 - Check quality of soil to hold water. (ribbon test if needed)
 - Check for % of non-soil (rocks, gravel, trash, etc). Should be no more than 10%.
 - At least ¼" (6%) of organic material. Color test/sod thickness evaluation.



Soil Evaluation-Reasons to Not Pass Part 1

- As of 1/1/2006, turfgrass must have at least 4" of soil support in new construction.
- Depth Not Enough:
 - Between 3-4 inches: top dress with 1 inch of compost
 - Must be hand-watered or watered with irrigation on the designated day and time.
 - If sod is found directly on rock or hardpan: pull sod and add 4 inches of soil.
 - First 6 months of 2026: Soil less than 3 inches (but not hardpan) requires 1 inch of compost, and a strike is issued to the builder.
 - After the third strike, any site may be required to amend the soil depth to 4 inches without using compost and that may include pulling sod.



Soil Evaluation-Reasons to Not Pass Part 2

- Non-Soil Content Greater than 10%
 - Non-soil includes rocks, gravel, trash, wood and/or more than 40% sand. (Sand does not hold water.)
 - Sieve method may be used to verify.
 - If sod has not been laid and the soil has not been raked as of the inspection, the soil portion will not pass.
- Organic Material
 - Sod thickness of at least one inch will usually fulfill the organic requirement due to attached topsoil on the sod.
 - Topdressing with compost can also fulfill the requirement.



Top 5 Irrigation Installation Reminders

- Landscape Irrigators Must be Licensed
 - Can't advertise or conduct irrigation services without a license.
- Permits must be secured BEFORE starting irrigation work
 - Permits must be pulled for all irrigation systems built within the CoSA city limits and CoSA ETJ. Lack of a permit will delay landscape variances or cause an operational inspection to delay or not pass.
- Licensed Irrigator or Irrigation Technician must be on site
 - While landscape irrigation is being actively installed (doesn't include trenching or digging).
- Irrigation Plan Review
 - All residential irrigation plans must be submitted to SAWS for approval.
 - Commercial irrigation plans inside the CoSA city limits or ETJ must be submitted to DSD for approval and a stamped copy be sent to SAWS prior to inspection. Commercial plans not reviewed by DSD must be sent to SAWS Conservation for review and approval.
- Operational Inspections
 - All new irrigation systems within the SAWS service area must have a SAWS operational inspection.

Final Reminder: Municipal and State Penalties

- All violations may be reported to TCEQ for administrative action or enforcement.
- Can be assessed to company or individual.
- Potential CoSA Class C Misdemeanor
 - Lack of irrigation permit.
 - Lack of irrigation license.
 - Absence of a licensed individual on site during installation.

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