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Simi Valley council votes to loosen watering rules

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The Simi Valley City Council voted unanimously Monday to loosen its water conservation ordinance to allow customers to irrigate on any three days a week from April 1 to Oct. 1.

From Nov. 1 to March 31, irrigation will be allowed on any two days of the week.

The total amount of time water users can irrigate their lawns is 45 minutes per week. The change in the ordinance takes effect immediately.

The city's ordinance originally allowed watering only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the summer, and Mondays and Thursdays in winter.

City officials said the change gives immediate flexibility to water users on what days they can water their lawns. It also gives city staff time to bring back an amended ordinance that gives only a minute allocation per week, completely eliminating the number of days one can irrigate each week.

The council approved the water conservation ordinance in July. A "Level 1" water-shortage emergency took effect in the city in August.

The city's ordinance is based on a model ordinance by the Metropolitan Water District, the city's water supplier. Metropolitan has required all of its customers to reduce total water consumption by 15 percent by June 2010.

City officials said complying with Metropolitan's ordinance is critical for the city to qualify for grant opportunities, and that restricting water usage on certain days was done to make it easier for enforcement of water rules.

Since the ordinance was approved in July, some council members, as well as members of the public, expressed concerns about the limitation on watering days and wanted the ordinance changed for more flexibility.

The city's ordinance also states that residents — as well as city and park agencies and schools — can't water between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., and lawns or "stations" can be watered for 15 minutes at a time, totaling 45 minutes per week.

No excessive water flow or runoff is permitted, and washing down hard or paved surfaces is not allowed.

The council also approved revising their billing system to give water customers the ability to see how much water they've used for a billing cycle, and compare it with the overall reduction goal. The system would alert water users when they use too much water.

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