



H₂O issues invite government control

This fall the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) released an updated Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance. It states all cities in California will have rules to limit the amount of water used for landscape irrigation by January 2010. Local governments can adopt the DWR ordinance or develop their own as long as they provide an equal level of water savings.

California is preparing for what will be a future of rising water costs and increasing scarcity. These regulations will be permanent regardless of when the three-year drought in the state ends.

Preparing for change

Landscapers and irrigation experts in the Golden State — and associations representing them — have been participating in public hearings about the ordinance these past few months. They've voiced their concerns to some of the provisions in the ordinance. Among the provisions are:

- › water budgets for landscapes,
- › the prevention of excessive erosion and irrigation runoff,
- › landscape and irrigation design requirements,
- › the use of recycled water where available,
- › irrigation audits and
- › scheduled irrigation based on local climate.

In a real sense this is government dictating what types of landscapes property owners in California

will have and how landscape professionals will be providing services to their customers.

Not confined to California

Don't look at this as a California-only phenomenon. It's national. Consider the U.S. EPA WaterSense program and its controversial proposed limits on the amount of turfgrass in landscapes. That's one of several provisions in the program that seems ill-advised. Water is the common denominator.

Whether there's an overt anti-industry bias in these decisions is debatable. The people making these rules almost certainly feel they're for the public's good. Disconcerting, however, is the too-often lack of inclusion of industry participants as part of the rule-making processes. Input from researchers and industry leaders is often ignored. Too bad.

Once policies and enforcement are in place, there's no turning back. Government involvement and oversight grow and rarely, if ever, shrink.

Unsettling also is the pace at which the process has been accelerating. Water-use restrictions seem to be popping up faster than landscape professionals can assimilate them into their service programs. While particulars vary from region to region, these rules typically include:

- › watering restrictions,
- › limits on turfgrass in landscapes,
- › landscape water budgets,
- › water audit requirements,
- › incentives for installing artificial turf in landscapes and
- › rebates for the purchase and use of irrigation-system technology, such as sensors and smart controllers.

Some mandates and guidelines are proven water savers and fit the landscape industry's broader environmental efforts. Others are questionable.

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