

STAGE 1 WATER SHORTAGE WARNING



Frequently Asked Questions

Why are we in a Stage 1 Water Shortage Warning?

One-hundred percent of Santa Cruz drinking water is from local rainfall, primarily from local rivers and creeks. This is the second dry year in a row, currently ranking as critically dry. We have only one reservoir, which only holds about a year's worth of water. While we may have enough supply for this year, we must always plan ahead to ensure we have enough supply if we have multiple dry years in a row.

How much water do customers get during a Stage 1 water shortage?

Each customer will receive a monthly allotment of water, which will be reflected on their water bill. Average monthly water use for a single family residential account prior to Stage 1 was 6 ccf; the Stage 1 Warning allotment for most single family households of three is 5ccf. (Ccf is a unit of water, which equals 748 gallons.)

If the residential allotment is based on a family of three, but I have five family members, can I request more water?

Yes. You can apply for additional water through your account in Water Smart <https://santacruz.watersmart.com> , or you can call customer service at (831) 420-5220.

Will people be penalized if they go over their allotted amount of water this year?

Not in a Stage 1 Warning. The idea is for people to become aware of their use and cut back appropriately now, so if we need to move to a Stage 2 Water Shortage next year – when penalties will be applied – customers will have already learned to live within their allotment.

What happens if I go over my monthly allotment of water?

If you go over your monthly allotment, you'll be notified on your bill. (Our version of a "nasty gram.") It's important that customers pay attention to their use, as this summer is a "practice run" for if we move to Stage 2 - at which time a "nasty gram" becomes an excessive use penalty.

What can customers use water for, and what can't water be used for?

Water waste is always prohibited, for example using water to hose down a driveway or sidewalk without having the hose controlled by a shut off valve. However as long as customers stay within their allotment they may use their water as they wish.

My property is wrongly categorized in the billing system as a multi-family dwelling, when it's a single-family dwelling (and vice-versa). What should I do?

Please call Customer Service directly at 831 420-5220 to have your classification changed.

My single family residence includes dogs/horses/lamas. Can I get more water for my animals?

The City's municipal code allows water allotments to be increased for two reasons: for large households with more than 3 persons; for a resident with a health condition that requires above normal indoor water use. During shortages, water is prioritized for indoor human uses.

My domestic water meter serves common area landscaping. Can I receive a higher water allocation?

No. The City Municipal Code does not allow for additional water for common area landscaping. During shortages, water is prioritized for indoor human uses. Please inquire with Water Service Engineering at 831-420-5210 about the possibility of installing a dedicated irrigation water meter for the property.

Is the Water Department going to charge a drought-cost recovery fee again?

We are not proposing to implement the drought-cost recovery fee at this time.

Will the Water Department patrol neighborhoods for water waste?

Water Department staff will not be actively patrolling neighborhoods during a Stage 1 Warning, however community members can call us with concerns about water waste and they will be investigated and acted upon as appropriate.

Where can I/who should I call if I see water being wasted? Customers should call the leak line at (831) 420-LEAK (5325) and leave a message or send an email to conservation@cityofsantacruz.com.

Are golf courses going to close?

During a Stage 1 Warning DeLaVeaga public golf course will remain open, as will Pasatiempo. Pasatiempo is a private golf course and is irrigated with recycled water from Scotts Valley.

How much do commercial/business accounts need to cut-back this year?

Commercial use fell dramatically in 2020 due to the pandemic, and is barely recovering. Commercial use is already below what is allowed in a Stage 1 shortage. Therefore there's no need for additional reductions in commercial use in order to meet our 10% system reduction goal.

Why are development projects still being approved when we have a water shortage?

Santa Cruz has had water supply problems for decades. With modern water efficiencies, modest development won't make our problem worse, just as preventing any new development won't make the problem go away. Santa Cruz has a water supply problem made worse by climate change; it's a problem that must be solved – regardless of development.

If we're still using water at the low rate we were during rationing in 2014/15, why do we need to cutback our use at all? Many customers who have maintained low use following rationing in 2014 and 2015 may not need to take additional actions, as their use may already be under the Stage 1 allocation of 5 ccf.

What's the best way for customers to stay informed about local water restrictions and their water use?

The best way is to sign-up for Water Smart. Water Smart is our customer web portal that allows customers to view detailed information about their water use. Customers can use WaterSmart to get information on how much they are using, get conservation tips, apply for a higher allocation, and get notifications of unusual use or use over a predetermined threshold. Sign up for Water Smart at <https://santacruz.watersmart.com>. Account numbers and zip codes are needed to register.

We have a large garden and orchard with fruit trees surrounding our home. We donate produce to food banks and other charities. Is there any way to increase our water usage or re-classify our home and land as “agricultural”?

During water shortages, indoor health and safety needs are prioritized over outdoor landscape needs, so you may not increase your allotment for irrigation. Account classifications are based on the municipal code, which states that a single family residential property classification shall apply “whether or not the residential dwelling unit is being put to a use other than, or in addition to, residential use.” Please see code section [16.01.055 WATER DEPARTMENT CUSTOMER CLASSIFICATIONS](#).

I operate a hair salon out of my home. Can at-home businesses get more water for their monthly allotment?

With the exception of in-home daycare facilities and sober living homes, home businesses do not qualify for increased water allotments. Please see the municipal code section <https://www.codepublishing.com/CA/SantaCruz/#!/SantaCruz16/SantaCruz1601.html#16.01.090>.

We live on a hill and are worried about extreme erosion if we’re unable to keep our native landscape alive. Does the department consider some exceptions for these special circumstances?

Additional water may not be provided to maintain landscaping for erosion control or fire prevention. Customers interested in fire prevention are encouraged to visit the City’s Fire Department page for information on how to create defensible space around your home <https://www.cityofsantacruz.com/government/city-departments/fire-department/fire-prevention/residents-reducing-wildfire-risks>.

I have a second home in Santa Cruz, which I use as my vacation home in the summer. There are more than 3 in my family - can I get more water allocated?

Residential water allotments may be increased for permanent residents when the household is greater than three people. A permanent resident is defined as someone who lives at the service address for at least 21 days within each monthly service period.

In contrast, short-term vacation rentals are not eligible for an increased allotment. These service addresses have an active rental permit with the City or County and have been flagged in the utility billing system as short-term vacation rentals.

Why are allocations for single family residences half of what they were during rationing in 2014-2015?

The short answer is because the community’s water use never rebounded after the last drought. Customer use characteristics used to develop the 2009 Water Shortage Contingency Plan, which was the basis for 2014 – 2015 allocations, was based on how customers used water in 2002-2004. The updated allocations being used today are from 2016 – 2018 use. Customer demand is now so much lower than it has been historically that average water use for single family customers is now just 6 ccf per month. Overall demand never rebounded from the restricted levels achieved between 2014 and 2015.

My neighbor’s water meter is broken and I know she uses more than her fair share! Why don’t you fix it?

We’re concerned about wasted water, too! The *average* age of a Santa Cruz meter is 18 years, with a total useful life of 20. Water meters are mechanical, and some of ours are slowing down (or stopping altogether) as the internal parts wear out. Some years ago, when we first noticed above-normal meter failures, we started to attack the problem meter by meter. It was costly and time consuming. At the same time, we also started work on a feasibility study that ultimately told us the most efficient and cost

effective path forward was a system-wide meter change out. The inefficiency of chasing down random meter failures throughout the system, coupled with the retail cost for small batches of meters, was way more costly than getting everything done in one fell swoop with a wholesale purchase of new equipment. The meter replacement project begins installations this fall.