

California's Water Budget

In response to California's recent severe drought, in 2018 two legislative bills were introduced, passed and signed into law as part of the California Water Code. Because the California Legislature declared that "The waters of the state are a limited and renewable resource subject to ever-increasing demands" and "The conservation and efficient use of urban water supplies are of statewide concern" but best carried out at the local level, Senate Bill (SB) 606 and Assembly Bill (AB) 1668 were enacted in tandem, with each one dependent on the passage of the other.

The two bills together recognize the importance of water to the residents of California, make arrangements for the adoption of long-term standards for efficient water use, authorize the development of performance measures for commercial, industrial, institutional (CII) and large landscape water users and establish a standard for indoor residential water use. In addition, the bills call for the creation of water reliability plans and require (rather than authorize) water agencies to declare a water shortage emergency under certain conditions.

The existing standard for indoor residential water use is 55 gallons per day per person. On January 1, 2025, the standard decreases to 52.5 gallons per capita per day. Then, on January 1, 2030, the standard drops to 50 gallons per person per day. By October 1, 2021, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) has been tasked to recommend standards for OUTDOOR water use, as well.

The 50 gallons per person per day guideline represents an average target for water providers, who will have increased reporting responsibilities with the passage of the two bills.

So, how much is 50 gallons per day? I did a quick calculation based on my last water bill. Since I am a one-person household, my usage is my responsibility alone. From April 10 to June 9 (60 days) my water usage was 692 cubic feet (water bills, water meters, delivery systems and consumption are often measured in cubic feet rather than gallons.) I multiplied 692 cubic feet by 7.48 (the number of gallons in each cubic foot) to determine my total of 5176 gallons of water used. Dividing that by the 60 days in the billing period, I arrived at a total usage of 86 gallons per day, both inside and outside the house. At first, I felt justified because – if Californians use half their residential water outdoors –I'm clearly within the 50 gallon per day indoor limit already. However, upon closer examination, May was an uncharacteristically cool and wet month when I did little outside watering. I clearly have some work to do to reach my conservation per capita usage by 2030.

What can we do to maximize our water use efficiency? Toilets are "by far the main source of water use in the home, accounting for nearly 30 percent of an average home's indoor water consumption. Older, inefficient toilets that use as much as 6 gallons per flush also happen to be a major source of wasted water in many homes." *

WaterSense ® labeled toilets, using 1.28 gallons per flush or less, exceed the current federal standard of 1.6 gallons per flush. If your home was built before 1992 and you still have older toilets (like I do), you may be eligible for a cash rebate when you replace your old toilet with a

water-efficient model. Contact your water utility for details and to determine if they offer a rebate program.

WaterSense-labeled products come in a wide variety from showerheads, toilets and bathroom faucets for private homes to commercial (spray heads and toilets), institutional (flushing urinals) and irrigation products such as controllers and spray sprinkler bodies. The next time you're doing any planning or remodeling that deals with water consumption, check out the most efficient products on the market by looking for the WaterSense label.

And, if you happened to see any of those doom-and-gloom social media posts about being fined for taking a shower and doing a load of laundry on the same day...not true! Water supply agencies will be setting new water budgets, it's true. However, if you read the text of the bills, it's only after repeated and intentional disregard for their water budgets that agencies may be fined for not meeting their budget targets in drought situations. Remember, it's the average per capita water use across a district that counts.

* <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/residential-toilets>
<https://www.sacbee.com/latest-news/article212605634.html#storylink=cpy>

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UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.