

Water Neutrality Ordinance FAQ

What is Water Neutrality?

A code that caps water use for new developments by limiting the project to the historical use for that individual parcel.

When Will this Go into Effect?

On May 23, 2017, City Council adopted this ordinance. It will start July 1, 2017 and on that date projects that are in the plan check process or that have received a building permit will not be required to comply.

Why is the City Doing this?

Santa Monica is committed to eliminating imported water to achieve water self-sufficiency by 2020. By implementing water neutrality for new developments, maximizing water conservation, local groundwater supplies, and alternative water supplies (graywater, rainwater, recycled water), all of the city's water needs will be met.

Who is Affected by this Rule?

Only new developments (residential and commercial) will need to comply with this ordinance. New developments, in this case, are defined as new buildings with plumbing fixtures, existing buildings that demolish 50% or more the exterior walls/structural support, and new or enlarged pools, spas, ponds, water features.



How Do I Comply?

Make your new development project as water-efficient as possible so that it will not use more water than the historical use of the development site (the five-year average water use for the existing property will be used as the baseline). The new development will calculate how much water it is projected to use each year. The difference between the baseline and the projected water use is called the "new water demand." If the new water demand is equal to or less than the baseline, then the project is in compliance. If the difference is greater than the baseline, the new development will need to rethink its design. Maybe more efficient toilets, showerheads, clothes washers will lower the projected use? Or maybe more advanced technologies will need to be installed like graywater, rainwater or recycled water systems?

The City will provide a technical design assistance program to guide applicants through the process and make them aware of technologies that could help them achieve compliance.

What If My Project Will Use More than Historical Usage for the Site?

If the final design shows the new water demand is greater than the historical usage for the site, then the applicant will need to offset that water somewhere else in the city. The options for offsets are the following:

City Direct Install Option – A fee-based turn-key solution with a pre-certified contractor that installs water saving toilets, showerheads, and faucet aerators at other properties throughout the city to offset your project's water use.

Developer Installation Option – The applicant will find properties in the City to retrofit, determine the water saving calculations, pay for the installations and permit fee for each device installed, and have each device inspected by the City.

How Much Will this Cost?

It will depend on many factors. How much water needs to be offset onsite? What are the different technologies and how much do they cost to install and maintain?

For the City's Direct Install Program to achieve the offset savings, the applicant will pay fees to cover the costs of the City's contractor. If applicant performs the retrofits, the applicant pays for all the necessary costs.

Who Was Involved in Creating this Ordinance?

A Water Neutrality Stakeholder Committee developed the ordinance. It is comprised of representatives of residents, water

agencies, non-governmental organizations, sustainability consultants, architects, developers, manufacturers, engineers, plumbers, The County of Los Angeles; the City's Water Advisory Committee; and staff from the Public Works Department, Planning and Community Development Department, and the City Attorney's Office.

Moving forward, the Water Neutrality Stakeholder Committee will further refine the guidelines and strategies for development projects.

How Does My Existing Property Participate in the City Direct Install Option?

The City is creating a list of existing properties that want to have new toilets, showerheads, and faucet aerators installed as part of the Direct Install Option. These participating properties will receive these water-saving products free of charge. To participate, email savewater@smgov.net or call (310) 458-8972.



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