

LESS LAWN MORE VALUE

Fact Sheet: New Rules for Watering Lawns in California

California law (AB 1572) will prohibit the use of potable (drinking) water to irrigate nonfunctional turf—lawns that serve no recreational or community purpose—at most commercial, industrial, and institutional (CII) properties, including common areas managed by homeowner associations (HOAs).

Early alignment during planning and design helps reduce risk, avoid costly revisions, and streamline approvals. This is especially important for projects with HOA components or public landscape dedications.

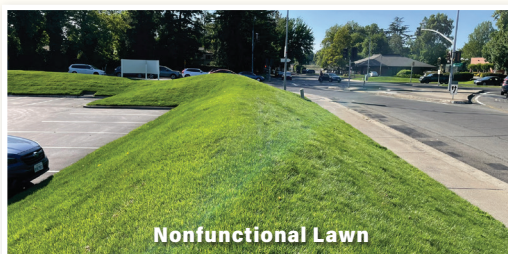


Chaparral Clematis *Clematis lasiantha*, California native

This fact sheet summarizes key requirements under AB 1572 and outlines how to address these requirements during entitlement and design.



Functional Lawn



Nonfunctional Lawn

WHAT IS NONFUNCTIONAL LAWN?

Nonfunctional lawn refers to irrigated lawn that is ornamental and not regularly used for recreation or public gatherings. Some lawn areas may serve a functional purpose if they are part of a required stormwater system, such as a rain garden or landscaped drainage feature. Check with your local permitting agency.

Functional Lawn

- School or sports fields
- Picnic areas and designated play spaces
- Any other areas where people regularly gather, play, or engage in recreational activities.

Nonfunctional Lawn

- Lawn in medians, roundabouts, or parking lots
- Unused patches near signage or building entries
- Lawn between buildings with no clear use
- Lawn along sidewalks, buildings, or fences
- Sloped or oddly shaped areas that are hard to use or water efficiently

WHAT'S CHANGING

- Water wasted on unused lawn will no longer be allowed. Only functional green spaces—like playfields, parks, and gathering areas—may be irrigated with potable water.
- New developments should avoid installing nonfunctional lawn unless it will be irrigated with a non-potable source such as recycled water or raw well water.
- Designs that include nonfunctional lawn may trigger costly redesigns.

AB 1572 + MWELO

AB 1572 works in tandem with the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO). MWELO sets standards for how landscapes should use water efficiently. AB 1572 adds new limits on where potable water may be used. Aligning both during the design phase helps avoid plan revisions and delays.

January 1, 2027

Public properties owned or managed by local and state governments

January 1, 2028

Commercial, industrial, and institutional properties

January 1, 2029

Common areas managed by HOAs, common interest development, and community service organizations

January 1, 2031

Public properties in Disadvantaged Communities, contingent upon available state financial assistance



Photo by Laurie Meyerpeter



Photo by
Tece Markel



Photo by Christine Kohn

GET AHEAD OF THE CURVE:

PROJECT PLANNING TIPS

STEP 1: Confirm Requirements Early: Check with your land use planner and water provider to verify how AB 1572 and MWELO apply to your project.

STEP 2: Identify Lawn That Cannot Be Irrigated:

Review plans for narrow, sloped, or ornamental lawns—these cannot use potable water and may require redesign.

STEP 3: Use Water-Wise Templates: Reference existing model plans, low-water plant palettes, and irrigation specifications that align with local MWELO requirements.

STEP 4: Align with Local Requirements: Integrate AB 1572 and MWELO compliance into your project's landscape and irrigation design early. Some jurisdictions require stamped plans and formal documentation of compliance during plan check, particularly for HOA or publicly maintained areas.

STEP 5: Coordinate Across Project Teams:

Ensure that entitlement consultants, civil engineers, and landscape architects are aligned on water-use restrictions, accessibility standards, and any impacts to egress or public access routes under ADA or local code.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T COMPLY?

Failure to comply with AB 1572's nonfunctional lawn irrigation restrictions can result in civil penalties of up to \$1,000 per day (California Water Code §1846). Enforcement specifics may vary by water agency and/or city/county; please contact your local provider for details.

WHY IT PAYS TO PLAN AHEAD

- Streamline permitting by addressing landscape requirements early
- Reduce project risk and avoid enforcement penalties
- Potentially lower water connection and capacity fees
- Increase long-term value and reduce maintenance costs
- Support environmental goals with sustainable landscape strategies

Water-wise designs may reduce connection fees, streamline permit approvals, and help your project receive approval faster.

Your Water Provider Can Help

Contact your local water agency or visit NonFunctionalTurfCA.org for resources:

- Rebate programs for landscape transformation and irrigation upgrades
- Pre-approved designs and plant lists
- Tree protection strategies and irrigation planning tools
- Site review and MWELO support



NonFunctionalTurfCA.org