

Melbourne 3a Water Restrictions

Melbourne's Water Restrictions – questions and answers

What stage of water restrictions are we in?

We are in Stage 3a water restrictions. Stage 3a water restrictions were introduced on 1 April 2007.

How long will we be in Stage 3a water restrictions?

The Minister for Water, Tim Holding, has announced we will remain in Stage 3a.

Why hasn't Melbourne entered Stage 4 restrictions?

Stage 3a water restrictions are achieving water savings almost equivalent to that expected under Stage 4. Stage 3a minimises the impact on industries affected by water restrictions, protects jobs and importantly, allows community activities such as sport to continue. It also allows householders to maintain some garden around their homes.

Why has Melbourne remained in Stage 3a water restrictions when trigger levels of other stages of restrictions have been crossed?

Stage 3a water restrictions have been achieving water savings almost equivalent to savings estimated for Stage 4. Remaining on Stage 3a restrictions has helped to avoid the impacts of Stage 4 restrictions, which effectively prohibits all outside water use, significantly impacting residential customers, businesses dependent on outdoor water use, and community sporting facilities.

While Melbourne dipped below the Stage 4 trigger point in late May 2007, this was at the start of the filling season. Given that water use during the winter months is typically low, and storages were unlikely to remain below the Stage 4 trigger for a significant period of time, Stage 3a continued. The decision to remain in Stage 3a was proven correct as storages recovered to above the Stage 3a trigger during early winter 2007.

Likewise, Melbourne storage levels have risen slightly above the Stage 3a trigger level but we have remained in Stage 3a (not moved into Stage 2) in order to provide some certainty to the community and industry while continuing to achieve water savings.

Moving frequently between stages of restrictions would cause public confusion and have only a marginal impact on water storage levels. Stage 3a restrictions will be in place.

When considering what level of restriction should be in place, a number of factors must be considered which includes storage levels, the time of year and weather forecasts.

What are the rules under Stage 3a water restrictions?

Under Stage 3a, plants can only be watered in the **morning** on your specified watering days as required. There is **no evening watering**.

It is dark at 6 am and I feel unsafe. Can I get an exemption?

Yes. In special circumstances such as if you are elderly, have a medical condition or a disability.

Note: Households with at least one resident aged 70 years or over may water their plants manually on specified watering days between 6 am - 8 am or 8 am - 10 am.

I am a shift worker and I work between the permitted watering hours - can I apply for an exemption?

Yes. However, given we will likely be in Stage 3a for a while; we prefer/recommend that you install an automatic dripper system.

I am following water restrictions and my bill has gone up. How can this be?

You may have a leak or be using more water inside your home.

Do restrictions apply to alternative water supplies?

No, water restrictions only apply to drinking water. Alternative water supplies such as rainwater and greywater can be used at anytime.

What solutions are there for water restrictions?

Solutions for water restrictions include:

- Using a bucket to collect 'warm up' water in the shower or scooping out bath or basin water
- Installing a water tank for both indoor and outdoor use
- Greywater diversion – connect a greywater diverter to your outdoor piping and collect the water in a large container
- Permanent Greywater Systems – install a permanent system for an alternative source of water for your garden. These systems must be installed by a plumber and require approval from your council. Remember greywater must be used within 24 hours of collection unless it has been treated. For further information contact the Environment Protection Authority www.epa.vic.gov.au/water or phone 9695 2722

Note: Rebates are available for water saving products. Visit www.ourwater.vic.gov.au and click on 'Water Smart Rebates' for more advice and information on rebates.

I'm installing a water tank and want to apply for a rebate, but heard the State Government will use this information to eventually tax me for the use of this water. Is this true?

This myth has reached almost epic proportions. No, we are not using the rebate process to collect information on customers with water tanks so that we can tax them in future. We have also spoken with the Plumbing Industry Commission (PIC) to help educate plumbers in Melbourne that this is not true and to ask for their help in dispelling this myth.

Will water utilities be increasing water rates for those customers who apply for rebates on water saving products (e.g., mulch, rainwater tanks)?

No. The water utilities actively encourage customers to conserve water and will not penalise those doing so by imposing higher prices.

The prices charged by the utilities are regulated by the Essential Services Commission. The Commission ensures the cost of providing services is both practical and efficient.

Residential customers are currently charged water usage on a three step inclining block tariff. As the volume used by a customer increases, the price per kilolitre increases. Thus a customer who installs water saving devices benefits financially in three ways:

- Saves water and thus pays for fewer kilolitres
- Possibly avoids moving to a higher step on the inclining block tariff and thus pays less per kilolitre
- Receives a rebate for the water saving devices

How much water does using rainwater tanks actually save?

Rainwater tanks are helping Victorians save around 1.5 billion litres of drinking water inside and outside the home in Victoria. More than 19,000 Victorian homes have installed a rainwater tank and received a water-saving rebate under a Brumby Government program (November 2007).

If we are in Stage 3a, what's the next level?

Stage 4 is the next level, which bans all outdoor water use and prohibits the washing of cars.



Why is it that only gardens have been targeted?

Outdoor water use has been focused on gardens because this type of water use can be modified and monitored with relative ease. Additionally there are a number of ways to save water inside the home for use outside which can help minimise the impact on the garden. Rainwater tanks can also be installed.

How much water are we saving by cutting down gardening watering times?

We have achieved significant savings in Stage 3a - reducing water consumption by 16% in 2008 compared to 2006 and exceeding water savings anticipated under Melbourne's Drought Response Plan. The estimated annual savings in the Drought Response Plan for Stages 3a and 4 are 15% and 17.5% respectively.

If we're running out of water, why would you permit residents to water their gardens?

We acknowledge the recreational and aesthetic benefits to people in our community, and have allowed residents to use limited amounts of water on their gardens.

What are sportsgrounds doing to save water?

Each local council rationalises their sportsgrounds. This means that one in four is selected to be watered. Water used on the sportsground needs to be reduced by 25%, in accordance with a water conservation plan, that has been submitted by each council to their water retailer. Many councils are now utilising recycled water, installing rainwater tanks and water efficient appliances.

Why are one in four sportsgrounds still permitted to water?

It is important that we keep our community sport going while still cutting back the amount of water that we are using.

Is this Stage 3a designed to appease the carwash and nursery industry?

The revision to create Stage 3a was made by taking into account all industries and communities affected by water restrictions.

Stage 4 Water Restrictions

Stage 3a water restrictions will remain in place. By staying in 3a we minimise the impact on industries affected by water restrictions, protect jobs and allow community activities such as sport to continue.

What are the key rules for Stage 4 water restrictions?

The key elements for Stage 4 water restrictions include:

- Lawns and gardens may not be watered at any time
- A bucket filled from a tap can be used to clean windows, mirrors and lights; and spot remove corrosive substances. This also applies to commercial car washes
- A new pool or spa of any size capacity cannot be filled

Storage/Trigger Levels

What are the storage levels today?

Check today's water storages at: <http://www.melbournewater.com.au/>

Why do we have trigger levels in the first place?

The trigger levels act as a guide for water businesses and the State Government when water storages are low.



Why do we have trigger levels if the State Government can decide to stay in a particular stage of restrictions regardless of storage levels?

Strictly following trigger levels, without any discretionary judgement of circumstances, can result in different stages of restrictions being introduced and removed in a very short space of time. This would cause unnecessary confusion throughout the community, so other factors are taken into consideration before making the decision.

Are all parts of Victoria affected by the possibility of the introduction of water restrictions?

Yes, a four-stage water restriction schedule is applied by local water utilities when storage levels reach trigger points for specific supply systems in each water retailer's region, safeguarding local water supplies.

Stages and trigger points may vary between water supply systems, reflecting local requirements. At this point most parts of Victoria are experiencing different levels of water restrictions.

Who decides whether we're on water restrictions?

The level of water restrictions is determined by the water authorities in consultation with the State Government based on the Drought Response Plan. Any variation to these restrictions is decided by the Minister for Water.

Gardening rules

Under Stage 3a water restrictions, can I water my lawn?

No. There is a complete ban on watering lawns for residents and businesses and exemptions are no longer available for new turf and/or establishing gardens. However, alternative sources (eg rainwater tank water or greywater) can be used at any time.

Can you hose in wetting agents?

No, in Melbourne we are in Stage 3a water restrictions and a lawn cannot be watered at anytime.

You can apply wetting agents, fertilisers, etc., just prior to rain or customers may use an alternative water supply such as greywater, rainwater etc.

Can I cut off my household downpipe and redirect the water to my lawn?

In times of drought we realise that it is common practise for homeowners to implement water saving solutions around their home. However according to the Plumbing Industry Commission (PIC) you need to be a licensed plumber to perform any roofing or stormwater work. This work is regulated by the PIC.

The reason this work is regulated is because the downpipe terminates just above the ground and is then connected to a stormwater output. If work is not done properly you can potentially flood the area and cause damage to the house's foundation and the surrounding area.

Incorrect connection or disconnection to stormwater outputs can also have wider implications.

If the water is not redirected properly, flooding under the house can cause stagnant water and/or rising damp - both of which undermine the underlying structure. If you perform this work yourself, you may inadvertently nullify your homeowner's warranty and/or roof warranty.

Under Stage 3a water restrictions, can I water my garden?

Yes. You may use a manual dripper system that you turn on or off by hand, hand-held hoses fitted with trigger nozzles, watering cans and buckets between 6am - 8am to water your **plants** as required two days per week on your designated watering days.

- Automatic dripper systems that turn themselves on and off can only be used between midnight and 2am on your two designated days per week



- Even and no-numbered properties can water plants on Saturday and Tuesday within specified times
- Odd numbered properties can water plants on Sunday and Wednesday within specified times
- Watering is not permitted on Monday, Thursday and Friday

Remember, most gardens do not need two full hours of watering. Please water according to your plants needs.

Why are you allowed to water your garden for two hours on specified watering days?

The Drought Response Plan states that watering may take place 'only as required' within specified watering hours. Everyone should abide by the Drought Response Plan and water only as required. The four-hour window, over two days, has been granted to provide for maximum flexibility for people with time constraints. We do not encourage watering for the full four-hour duration.

I have a domestic vegetable garden and the limited watering hours don't suit my needs. Can I get an exemption?

No. Stage 3a was developed to reduce the impact on residential gardeners and both ornamental and domestic produce gardens fall under the same rules. These rules allow manual watering between 6am – 8am on designated watering days or automatic watering using a dripper system between midnight and 2am on designated watering days.

The severity of our water situation is really driving innovation in water management, and we encourage our customers to actively pursue the use of alternative sources such as greywater, rainwater (stormwater reuse or tanks) and recycled water.

We also recommend speaking to one of the experts at an authorised Water Saver Garden Centre to discuss water wise solutions.

How do I water/keep my vegetable garden healthy?

You can:

- Water your vegetable garden on your designated watering days
- Use rainwater
- Collect drinking water while waiting for the water to heat up in the kitchen and bath as well as rinse water from washing fruit or vegetables
- Consider using a sunshade to protect your plants from direct sun during the heat of the day
- Speak to your local nursery or garden centre for more tips

To encourage strong healthy root growth, use a plant tonic or soil conditioner. These increase root growth which means more water absorbing tissues and tougher plants. Soil conditioners also work at a cellular level, to significantly reduce water loss, which means plants have a better tolerance to heat and drought and take longer to show signs of stress like wilting.

Other tips for keeping your vegetable garden include:

- Good soil preparation is essential. It is important that the soil has the capacity to hold enough water and nutrients to sustain a good crop, and this means you need to add plenty of compost and organic matter to the soil
- Use organic mulches like pea straw or Lucerne. They help to conserve moisture and break down relatively quickly, improving the structure and fertility of the soil
- Mix water-storing crystals through the soil before planting your crop. They store water near the plant roots enabling plants to draw water, as they need it. As a consequence plants are better able to withstand dry weather conditions and infrequent watering



- Fertilise – regular doses of plant tonics and soil conditioners can help plants cope with stresses like heat and dehydration. They increase root development for optimal water uptake and improve plants' natural resistance to insect and fungal attack – which is a good thing because healthier plants are less susceptible to stress. They also stimulate the root system of plants and increase reproductive capacity – which means more flowers and fruit
- For vegetables that have already been planted - Poke vertical holes into the soil or potting mix around the root zone and trickle a small amount of crystals into each hole. Top off with soil or potting mix and water thoroughly

I thought I couldn't use greywater on a vegetable garden if you eat the produce raw – is this true?

True, the EPA recommends you don't use greywater from the kitchen, bath or laundry on a vegetable garden if the crop is to be eaten raw or uncooked. However you can use the drinking water you capture while waiting for the water to heat up in the kitchen and bath.

Exactly what type of greywater is okay for watering vegetable gardens?

You can use the drinking water you capture while waiting for the water to heat up in the kitchen and bath as well as rinse water from washing fruit or vegetables.

The EPA recommends you don't use greywater from the kitchen, bath or laundry (i.e. water with soap residue) on a vegetable garden if the crop is to be eaten raw or uncooked.

If people with pools can top up with a bucket why can't people with vegetable gardens do the same?

Stage 3a is a practical balanced approach to managing Melbourne's water supplies. Stage 3a provides Melburnians with greater certainty while maintaining the existing savings by households, industry and the wider community. This certainty enables gardens to be watered and allows sport to continue throughout summer and autumn. The filling of pools can continue (via buckets only) to ensure that the pool's structure and filtration system is not compromised. Without water, pools can break and rise out of the ground. To avoid the need to fill the pool, owners can maintain proper chemical balance and minimise evaporative losses and also water loss from excessive splashing.

Dripper Systems

What is a dripper system?

A dripper system drips water on, or near to the root zone of plants. The system must use a fixed rate of flow, which does not exceed nine litres per hour for every linear meter of watering system. You can contact your local water utility about retrofitting a dripper system to your current watering system.

What areas of my garden can I water with a dripper system?

Most areas including: ornamental gardens; plants on slopes and flat ground; and vegetable gardens. Please note that lawns cannot be watered.

Why is it more effective to use a dripper system rather than a spray sprinkler system?

Dripper systems place water directly on the root of plants. They minimise water loss that can be a result of windy conditions, evaporation and run-off. Dripper systems also reduce the risk of plant fungal and insect problems, as leaves are not watered.

Is it best to place a dripper system on top of or under soil?

Dripper systems can be laid either above or below the soil or in a layer of mulch. Placing dripper systems in these environments ensures that your plants can absorb the maximum amount of water.



Can I convert my current watering system to a dripper system?

Yes. Existing sprinkler heads can be removed and replaced with drip emitters and existing holes can be plugged. For further information contact your local irrigation specialist, hardware store or garden nursery.

Note: Since 1 September 2005 any new automatic dripper system installed is required to have a rain or soil moisture sensor controller integrated into the system. We recommend that older systems be fitted with such sensors too – in fact it is compulsory for Councils to have these sensors on any automatic watering system.

How can I ensure that my system is only using 9 litres of water per hour per linear meter?

You can purchase a flow control device from all good gardening centres and hardware stores that will help you do this, or contact your local irrigation specialist.

Where can I purchase a dripper system?

Contact your local irrigation specialist - you can find them by visiting www.irrigation.org.au or checking your yellow pages (under irrigation). You can also visit your local garden centre.

Watering days for gardens

What if I don't have a house number?

Where there is no house number the property is considered as an 'even' numbered house. Even and no-numbered properties can water plants on Saturday and Tuesday within specified times.

What if my automatic dripper system doesn't allow me to water on my set days?

There are a number of options available to customers in this situation:

- Re-read the instructions of your system – our research shows that up to 40% of automatic watering system owners do not know how to program their system – otherwise contact the manufacturer for more information
- Your dripper system may handle 'set' days of the week (i.e. Sat & Tue). If this is the case you will be able to program your system to manage a week's watering in advance – requiring you to reset your program once weekly
- If your dripper system does not handle either of these options, perhaps it can be upgraded with additional hardware to make it perform as required under Stage 3a restriction rules. Speak to your product manufacturer or contact your local Water Saver Garden Centre
- Alternatively you can switch over your automatic dripper system to the manual setting and water according to the manual watering restrictions

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I am going on holidays and am worried that I will be watering at the wrong times. What can I do?

Residents, business, industry and Government are required to follow Stage 3a water restrictions. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that they are complying with the restrictions – even when they are on holidays.

The best solution is to install an automatic dripper system before you go, however if our tips (see above) don't help then perhaps seek assistance from your relatives, friends or neighbours to water your plants while you are away.



Why are even numbered houses disadvantaged by having one of their watering days on a Saturday? A lot of people go out on Friday night - and it's hard to get up on a Saturday morning when people work all week.

The Drought Response Plan states that even numbered houses can water on a Saturday and Tuesday. It was developed in consultation with the community and it was fair to give even and odd numbered households the opportunity to water their garden on the weekend.

Why does the rule of only watering two days a week exist? It's tough on people with automatic dripper systems.

It is important to understand that there is a water shortage at the moment and we must do our best to save water wherever we can. Watering two days a week has been successful in other parts of Victoria and Australia for a number of years and we have already found this to be true in Melbourne.

What if I refuse to abide by this rule?

Penalties apply for non-compliance.

What level of consultation took place to formulate these rules of odds and even watering?

The water industry undertook extensive consultation in this and other rules enforced as part of the four-stage restriction schedule. Forums took place with industry associations and peak bodies; advice was sought from industry experts in the horticultural and other industry sectors. Additionally, public comment was sought through an open invitation in the press.

It should also be noted that this system has been in place in many other jurisdictions and in fact has been part of Melbourne's water restrictions (in the superseded Drought Response Plan) since the early 1990s.

Can I use a spray bottle that is not equipped with a trigger nozzle on the bottle to apply gardening products to gardens (i.e. fertilisers etc)?

Yes. Bottles of garden product equipped with and without trigger nozzles or on/off switches can be used. Conditions follow:

- only to be used on garden beds
- not to be used on lawns
- only to be used during the authorised watering times for water restrictions

Can I clean my lawn mower?

Any lawn mower (sit-on or push) can be cleaned in accordance with the requirements of a vehicle for the various stages of restrictions.

What if I need to fill my dam with drinking water?

The Drought Response Plan allows for the filling of dams and tanks when the dam is to be used for fire fighting, public health or stock purposes. For all other purposes your local water retailer's permission is required.

If the dam is partially filled with drinking water and is mixed with another source of water (i.e. stormwater or bore water) and is to be used for irrigation purposes during restrictions, the dam is considered to be entirely filled with drinking water. Irrigation watering can only take place in accordance with the relevant stage of water restrictions.

Vehicle Washing

Under Stage 3a water restrictions, can I wash my car?

Cars may not be washed at home with drinking water.



Under Stage 3a water restrictions, you may only wash your car by using a water efficient commercial or mobile car wash. Only commercial or mobile car washes which meet water efficient requirements can operate in metropolitan Melbourne.

You may use a bucket, filled directly from a tap to clean car windows, mirrors and lights; and to spot-remove corrosive substances only.

Or you may wash your car at home if you are using an alternative source of water such as rainwater.

How do I know if a commercial car wash is an approved, water efficient car wash?

Only approved, water efficient commercial or mobile car washes may operate. Look for signage that says- 'working within water restrictions under an approved water conservation plan'.

A Water Conservation Plan can be prepared either in accordance with the Water Rating Scheme developed by the Smart Water Fund and the Australian Car Wash Association, or independently, and must be approved by the relevant water retailer.

Sports

I represent a baseball/softball club – is any part of our diamond considered to be an exempt playing surface?

Yes. The following areas are considered exempt and can be watered in accordance with the rules for such surfaces:

- The parts of the infield that are the batters' base running areas (the running areas and the bases)
- The pitching mound and immediate surrounds (but not the whole infield area between the mound and the lines between the bases)
- This is regardless of whether these areas are en-tout-cas, turf/grass, or any other surface that requires water to maintain durability and safety

The rest of the infield (the area between the pitching mound and lines between bases, and the area immediately outside the lines between 2nd, 3rd and 4th) and the outfield are not considered an exempt playing surface.

Pools and Spas

Why are there swimming pool exemptions?

Swimming pool exemptions are designed to:

- prevent ongoing water loss
- protect the pool infrastructure

The Drought Response Plan allows for pools to be filled ensuring a pool's infrastructure isn't compromised. Without water, pools can crack and rise out of the ground.

No new pool exemptions are allowed under stage 3a and as of 18 December 2008 the water utilities will no longer continue to honour pool exemptions granted prior to the introduction of stage 3 in January 2007. Customers with signed contracts from before 18 December 2006 were previously allowed to fill their pool, however it has been exactly two years since these customers signed a contract and we believe that ample time has gone by in which to build a pool.

Under Stage 3a:



- A new pool or spa of any size cannot be filled with drinking water, however they may be filled with alternative sources of water such as bore water
- Existing* pools or spas with a capacity of less than 2,000 litres can only be topped up using a bucket or watering can, filled directly from a tap (not by means of a hose)
- Existing* pools with a capacity greater than 2,000 litres that require repairs may only be refilled where a customer can provide both a Water Conservation Plan and a structural report from an independent contractor
- In the case of an owner/occupier, an approved building permit from their local council is required.
- If you need to perform maintenance or repairs, please contact your local retailer before initiating works.

***Please note:** Existing means existing at the time when the prevailing stage of restrictions was declared and has been set-up permanently and been at least 75% full during that time.

Under Stage 3a water restrictions can I fill my pool?

A new pool or spa of any size capacity cannot be filled. However a swimming pool or spa may be filled with alternative sources of water.

An existing pool or spa of less than 2,000 litres may be filled with a bucket filled directly from a tap (and not by means of a hose).

An existing pool or spa of greater than 2,000 litres must not be filled except in accordance with a water conservation plan (contact your local water business for more information)

An existing pool or spa must not be topped up except by means of a watering can or bucket, filled directly from a tap (not by means of a hose).

Why do I have to use a bucket to top up my pool and not a hose?

We understand that this requires more effort, but encourage pool owners to avoid the need to top up regularly by:

- Installing a pool cover to minimise evaporation
- Managing chemical balance to minimise backwash and dumping requirements
- Managing play activities in the pool to minimise splash

What is required if I need to top up or fill a municipal pool?

Written approval from the local water retailer is required. You need to apply by way of a letter signed by the council CEO outlining why the top up or fill is necessary.

During Stage 3a – Why can my neighbour still top up his pool with a bucket yet I cannot water my lawn?

The filling of pools can continue (via buckets only) to ensure that the pool's structure and filtration system is not compromised. Without water, pools can break and rise out of the ground.

To avoid the need to fill the pool, owners can maintain proper chemical balance and minimise evaporative losses and also water loss from excessive splashing.

Industry

What is industry doing to save water?

Water restrictions have always applied equally to industry, however additional measures have been introduced by the State Government and the water industry. These measures are designed to minimise impact on the economy while still making significant water savings.



Businesses using 10 megalitres of water or more per year must complete a water management action plan (waterMAP program). There are more than 1,845 business customers in Victoria that fit into this group.

The top 200 non-residential water consumers in Melbourne have already developed water management plans under the Victorian Government's Pathways to Sustainability program. Over 6 billion litres of water have been saved since 2001 through this program, representing a 13% efficiency gain. Water utilities will continue to work with the biggest industrial commercial and institutional water users.

What types of areas will the WaterMAP program target?

Measures will target:

- outdoor usage consistent with residential measures
- efficiency in cooling towers
- water efficient production processes (water management plans)
- use of recycled water in manufacturing processes (where possible and fit for purpose)
- indoor domestic usage – taps, toilets and showers (step beyond domestic requirements)

Are WaterMAPs mandatory?

Yes. Eligible business customers are required to:

- Register their intention to prepare a waterMAP
- Develop a waterMAP
- Submit their waterMAP to their local water retailer
- Report annually to the water corporation on their implementation of the waterMAP

What if industrial customers don't prepare a waterMAP?

Penalties can apply to business and other non-residential sites that do not comply with these requirements in accordance with the set timeframes.

Industry should be doing more to save water as they use more water than domestic customers.

In Melbourne the non-residential sector including industrial and commercial customers make up about 30% of Melbourne's demand for water in comparison to the residential sector that accounts for 60% of the demand for water.

Other Stage 3a questions

Do the restrictions also affect commercial and industrial customers?

Yes – Stage 3a water restrictions affect how commercial and industrial customers use water.

Can windows, roofs and building facades in new homes be cleaned with a hose?

No - only a bucket can be used unless there is an accident, fire, health or safety hazard in which case a hose fitted with a trigger nozzle may be used.

Can I use a bucket to clean my driveway and paving?

Water restrictions prohibit using water to clean driveways and pathways except in the case of accident, fire, or hazard to health reasons.

Will we still have to pay full service charges?

The Water Service Charge is a fixed quarterly charge for every property connected to the water supply system. It contributes to the cost of operating and maintaining water mains to enable us to continue to supply high quality water.



The Sewerage Service Charge is also a fixed quarterly charge for every property connected to the sewerage system. It contributes to the cost of operating and maintaining the sewerage system.

If your property is connected to the water and sewerage supply, the quarterly service charges remain payable.

I own a small business - how do restrictions affect me?

You are subject to the same restrictions as listed for residential customers.

Water used in production processes, that is for internal use or as part of product manufacture remains unrestricted at this time. In some cases, if you are in an industry sector that is affected by domestic watering prohibitions you may have some restrictions on use. Industries affected include: Commercial Car Washes, Nurseries, and Pool Construction.

Is a high-pressure system equivalent to a hand-held trigger hose during any stage of restrictions?

Yes. During Stage 3a water restrictions, where a high-pressure water-cleaning device is not specified within the restriction requirements, it is considered an equivalent to a hand-held trigger hose and may be used.

Penalties

Will there be penalties?

Yes – penalties apply for non-compliance with water restrictions.

Our first priority is to educate the community. However, we can issue a Penalty Infringement Notice (fine) or restrict supply for repeat breaches. Recent changes in legislation also allow us to issue a fine for serious breaches without providing advance notification.

We have found that in many cases residents and businesses that are issued with a breach notice are inadvertently doing the wrong thing and generally ensure they are compliant in the future.

What is the process?

If a water retailer receives a complaint regarding water use that violates restrictions, they may send an educational letter advising the customer of the current stage of water restrictions and what is and what is not allowed. On other occasions they may visit the customer or site to investigate.

If authorised water officers identify a customer who is not complying with Stage 3a water restrictions, they may issue a formal warning or a fine in the mail or in person.

The fine for non-compliance with Stage 3a water restrictions is \$468.00. Alternatively, customers observed breaching restrictions can have their water supply restricted or face prosecution.

Before a formal warning or fine is issued, authorised water officers will check to see if the customer has an exemption or is using rainwater or greywater (which can be used at any time during Stage 3a restrictions). We still encourage people who notice a water user doing the wrong thing to call the water restriction hotline of their local water retailer (13WATER, 13 92837).

13WATER

How do I get more information on water restrictions or report a breach?

13WATER (13 92837) is a phone number that customers can call if they would like information on water restrictions, report a breach on water restrictions or report a water or sewage emergency or fault. The call is then diverted to the appropriate water retailer.



Exemptions

Does the exemption I received under previous levels of water restrictions still apply?

If you have been provided with an exemption under Permanent Water Saving Rules or previous levels of water restrictions for medical reasons your exemption may carry over to Stage 3a water restrictions.

All exemptions currently issued will be reviewed by your water retailer and you will be advised in writing as to whether your exemption can continue.

What is the difference between an 'Exemption' and an 'Exempt Playing Surface'?

An exemption is provided for customers who:

- Can demonstrate that less water would be used by their proposal
- Have special needs (often medical reasons)
- Would reduce /minimise physical damage to an asset
- Can demonstrate adverse effects on public health or safety
- Would not, in combination with other comparable applications, have a significant impact on daily water demand
- Are likely to be supported by other customers of the water retailer

An exempt playing surface is a defined area of playing surface for a certain sport, which has designated watering requirements. Areas include:

- Cricket pitches
- Running tracks
- Certain tennis courts
- Hockey pitches, bowling and croquet greens
- Golf greens and tees
- Soft fall areas of children's play equipment
- Some areas of baseball and softball pitches

Water Patrols

Do you have people to enforce water restrictions?

Water patrols have been introduced to ensure that water utilities have a stronger presence in the community throughout the duration of water restrictions. There are over 140 officers and 90 cars patrolling the streets 24 hours a day.

Water Patrols are employees of City West Water, South East Water and Yarra Valley Water and are also burst and leaks maintenance employees and meter readers.

Water Patrols look out for customers who are not complying with water restrictions, visit houses where people are asking for advice and provide assistance on restrictions as well as follow-up suspected breaches.

Other Questions

What else is the Government doing to ensure our water supply is sustained for the future?

In 2004 the State Government put in place a long-term plan for water - Our Water Our Future. The next stage of this plan, released in June 2007, committed \$4.9 billion to be spent on major water infrastructure projects to provide the biggest boost to Victoria's water supplies in 25 years. The plan involves:

- A new desalination plant



- Modernising Victoria's Food Bowl irrigation system to capture lost water for irrigation, the environment and Melbourne
- Expansion of Victoria's Water Grid
- Upgrading Melbourne's Eastern Treatment Plant to provide over 100 GL of recycled water in 2012 and assessing a range of alternative uses of this water
- Supporting new and existing water conservation programs for homes and industry

For more information, visit the Our Water Our Future website, www.ourwater.vic.gov.au

Is water still being used in the City Link Tunnels?

Since 2003 a water treatment plant at the tunnel has been operational. The plant treats the water that seeps into the Burnley Tunnel so that it can be reused to recharge the aquifer. This plant significantly reduces the amount of drinking water used in operation by City Link (about 97% of the water is re-used).

The aquifer around the tunnel must be recharged in order to minimise land subsidence resulting from the construction and operation of the tunnel.

Why don't we just build another dam?

Unfortunately dams do not create more water - there has to be adequate rainfall to fill them. A new dam would also take water from rivers that are already stressed.

For more information about government policy on dams, visit the Our Water Our Future website, www.ourwater.vic.gov.au

Why aren't we using recycled water instead of drinking water for industry/agriculture/open spaces?

We are using recycled water instead of drinking water for industry/agriculture/open space. In Victoria recycled water is mostly only used by non-residential customers. This includes golf courses, wineries, schools, nurseries, turf growers, farms and a major construction project in Melbourne's southeast.

There are a number of new residential developments around Victoria that are using or progressing toward the use of recycled water for watering the gardens, washing cars and flushing toilets.

Shouldn't government water authorities be doing more to reduce leakage in the system?

Melbourne's water businesses have some of the most comprehensive water leakage management programs and, according to an international study; they have one of the lowest infrastructure leak rates in the world.

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