

Popular cash-for-grass program expands during drought

The Associated Press

A major water wholesaler on Tuesday added \$350 million to its budget to replenish a cash-for-grass program that has gained popularity during the California drought with homeowners, landlords and businesses looking to replace water-draining lawns.

The giant Metropolitan Water District of Southern California board approved the additional money to pay homeowners and businesses to put in drought-friendly landscaping, spokesman Bob Muir said.

The change brings the program's total two-year conservation budget up to \$450 million in a one-time emergency measure to respond to the drought, Muir said.

There is more than enough demand for the program as residents and businesses have rushed to request the rebates since April, when Gov. Jerry Brown ordered mandatory cuts in urban water usage.

The number of weekly lawn-removal requests more than tripled to about 3,000 after Brown's order, an agency report said. It said the agency has received applications that would total \$330 million, though not all of those are likely to be approved.

Under the program, the agency pays \$2 per square foot to replace grass. A maximum rebate of \$6,000 is allowed per residence.

The move came after a vote from the same board last month to slash regional water deliveries by 15 percent beginning in July.

The board includes 37 representatives of member districts that serve about 19 million people across Southern California.