

## California agency sets low-water lawn rules in drought

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FILE - In this June 23, 2015, file photo a lawn is irrigated in Sacramento, Calif. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File)

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California extended its drought-inspired purge of idyllic emerald lawns from new developments, with state officials voting Wednesday to adopt more stringent water limits on landscapes for new homes and businesses.

The rules approved by the California Water Commission would essentially eliminate grass from new office and commercial buildings and reduce turf at new homes from a third of landscaped area to a quarter.

The rest of the landscapes can feature rocks, shrubs or low water-using plants such as lavender and jasmine.

The Department of Water Resources estimates future residential and commercial lawns will use nearly a third less water under the new standards.

New subdivisions and homes won't necessarily be devoid of lawns, however. Developers of traditional-looking landscapes can comply if the homes or businesses are hooked up to recycled water from showers and toilets.

Californians won't have to rip out existing lawns unless they are going through major home renovation that requires government permits.

The changes are part of an update to the state's model landscape ordinance that was ordered by Gov. Jerry Brown

as part of measures to conserve water. Local governments must adopt those rules, or something just as water-saving, by December.

The state already updated its building standards to minimize lawn watering, but the rules adopted Wednesday apply to more homes and require even less water. Officials at the Department of Water Resources said the building standards will likely be adjusted to match its rules.

Brown's administration has targeted decorative lawns as a waste of water and an easy sacrifice for conservation efforts during the ongoing, four-year drought. Regulators are encouraging residents to let their lawns go brown to help cities meet mandatory water use reduction targets to stretch supplies if the dry spell persists.

Jurgen Gramckow, who founded one of California's largest companies to grow sod for suburban landscapes, laments the vilification of lawns as symbolism that will not yield substantive water savings.

"The beautiful green California landscape? It's history," Gramckow, president of Southland Sod Farms, said in an interview Wednesday. "Nobody really appreciates the environmental benefits associated with lawns. Lawns are taken for granted."

Some environmentalists say the state isn't going far enough because not a single drop of depleted water should be wasted on decorative lawns. Even when lush lawns are watered with sink and washing machine waste, drinking-quality water is used as a backup, said Natural Resources Defense Council policy analyst Tracy Quinn.

"We are a state prone to drought that should move away from the ideal of every home having a lawn that is watered with precious drinking water," Quinn said.