

Fresno homebuilders reducing grass use ahead of state rule

By BoNhia Lee
blee@fresnobee.com

The Fresno-area homebuilding industry knew it was coming.

In the midst of a four-year drought, it was only a matter of time before California water restrictions affected the use of grass in new developments.

The [California Water Commission](#) on Wednesday adopted water limits that eliminate grass from new office and commercial buildings and reduce the amount used at new homes from one-third of the landscaped area to 25%.

“We knew we were fighting an uphill battle,” said Mike Prandini, president and chief executive officer of the [Building Industry Association of Fresno and Madera Counties](#). “For this area, these regulations were kind of expected.”

Summer in the hot, dry central San Joaquin Valley is a difficult time to establish grass and plants, Prandini said. It has become even harder in the drought as watering restrictions limit the number of days homeowners can water their lawns.

It’s been one of the more difficult things we’ve come across for some time because we know what people’s expectations are, at least here in the Valley, with new homes...at the same time, we’re battling with trying to do what’s right.

Peter Castanos, vice president Wathen Castanos Homes

Local builders started cutting grass out of its landscaping even before the drought. With density requirements, lots are smaller so there is less landscaping to begin with, Prandini said. Builders have looked at ways to design a yard that looks nice and doesn’t require tons of watering or maintenance.

These new rules “are in reaction to the emergency declaration,” Prandini said.

Fresno’s [McCaffrey Homes](#) and other builders have always been conscious of the need to conserve water.

“For many years our homes have included weather-smart irrigation controls, drought tolerant landscaping among other water saving features,” said Karen McCaffrey, vice president. “With our new model homes, Liberty Square, we re-imagined the yards as outdoor living spaces thus limiting the amount of lawn, to give our homebuyers an idea about how they might do the same.”

Fresno-based [Wathen Castanos Homes](#) did away with grass in its South Valley homes a year ago when it became clear that water restrictions wouldn’t allow the grass to stay alive. Now, the builder is installing drought-tolerant plants with no grass in all its homes.

The new rules are like an update to housing codes, said Freddie Logue, vice president of construction. In conversations with community leaders, it seemed like “the state of California wanted to get rid of turf across the board,” he said.

“We’re just along for the ride, to see where they are going to go (with this) and see what we can do to give homeowners the American dream.”

BoNhia Lee: [559-441-6495](tel:559-441-6495), [@bonhialeee](https://twitter.com/bonhialeee)

