



# Waukesha Water Utility

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## **Waukesha Sprinkling Ordinance Takes Effect**

### *City is Mailing Brochure to Residents*

Waukesha's new sprinkling ordinance – one of the strictest in the nation – took effect May 1. A brochure for residents has been mailed by the Waukesha Water Utility and should arrive in mailboxes within a few days.

Newly-elected Waukesha Mayor Larry Nelson said the new ordinance is one of the first steps in a comprehensive water plan. "I made a commitment during the campaign to promote water conservation. The sprinkling initiative is just part of our plan to conserve and protect our water."

Midday use of sprinklers – when as much as 40% of the water simply is wasted through evaporation – is generally not allowed under the new ordinance. Residents are limited to watering on two assigned days per week. The ordinance is in effect from May 1 through October 1, beginning this year.

City of Waukesha residents with odd-numbered addresses may use sprinklers on Tuesdays & Saturdays before 9 a.m. and after 5 p.m. Those with even-numbered addresses may use sprinklers on Thursdays & Sundays before 9 a.m. and after 5 p.m. A watering can, container or hose may be used at any time to water gardens, trees or shrubs if the watering device is used by hand and not left unattended.

Waukesha's water use has declined 25% since 1988, despite a 17% increase in population. However, dwindling water supplies mean the city must increase its conservation efforts. The Water Utility recently adopted a comprehensive plan to conserve, protect, and replenish water, including a goal to reduce per capita water use by 20% by 2020. Mayor Nelson said he promised at last year's hearing by the Council of Great Lakes Governors that he is committed to water conservation efforts. "No matter where our water comes from, we must protect it," he said.

Dan Duchniak, General Manager of the Utility, said he believes most Waukesha residents understand the need to use less water. "Individual customers can control their water bills by taking additional steps to reduce water use," Duchniak said. "They can help their pocketbooks and the environment at the same time."

The Water Utility considered allowing watering every other day, but studies show that even day/odd day schedules actually increase water use. "People then assume they should water every other day, even though they never watered that much in the past," Duchniak said.

A primary purpose of the ordinance is to reduce peak water usage that occurs when many residents water their lawns at the same time. Peak water use can strain water supplies, especially during droughts.

Typical lawns will stay healthy with one inch of water from a combination of rainfall or sprinklers every week, according to Ann Wied, consumer horticulture educator at UW-Extension Waukesha County. Wied said residents with lawn and garden questions can call the horticulture hotline at (262) 548-7779 between 9 a.m. and noon, Mondays through Fridays.

New landscaping may be watered at any time during the first month after it is installed if it meets one of three criteria. The new landscaping must have been installed at the time of new construction, alter more than one-fourth of the area of a small existing yard, or alter an area greater than 3,000 sq. feet of any existing yard. A special variance permit is **not** required for sprinkling new landscape. Outdoor sports complexes and cemeteries are also exempt from the regulation.

Special variances may only be granted by the Utility to avoid an emergency condition affecting health, sanitation or fire protection or if the ordinance substantially deprives the applicant of his or her financial livelihood.

If an emergency water condition is declared by the Utility, additional restrictions on outdoor water use will be imposed.

When the city determines that a sprinkling violation has occurred, a notice will be posted near the front door of the property or mailed to the person responsible for the water bill. If a third notice is required, it will be also mailed to the property owner. When the violation persists after three or more notices, the city may refer the matter to the police department for a citation to be issued.

A minimum forfeiture of \$160 applies for first offenses. However, in 2006, the city intends to focus on educating the public about the new restrictions.

#### ***New water supply needed***

Waukesha's current water source is a deep aquifer that flows toward Lake Michigan. The groundwater has been drawn down by more than 600 feet, due to heavy use by communities in southeastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. A layer of shale above the deep aquifer prevents the water from being quickly recharged by rainfall or snowmelt.

The drawdown has caused a number of communities to switch from the deep aquifer to Lake Michigan surface water over the years, including the city of Milwaukee and Chicago suburbs. Waukesha is currently exploring options for a new water source, due to levels of radium and other contaminants that increase as the water level declines.

#### ***New ordinance part of broader conservation plan***

The city's new sprinkling ordinance is just one small part of the city's conservation efforts.

The Water Utility adopted a plan in March to achieve the city's goal of reducing per capita water use by 20% by 2020. It also includes suggestions for revising stormwater and development regulations that will help replenish water and protect it from pollution. Reductions in water use will be accomplished through a combination of public education, new regulations and possible incentives and rebates, according to the report.

According to the plan, the Water Utility will work with the state Public Service Commission to become the first water utility in the state to end the practice of lowering water rates as a customer's use increases.

The Utility's conservation plan does not just include efforts to reduce water use, however. Current rules on stormwater and development of subdivisions should be strengthened to ensure greater infiltration and replenishment of groundwater, the plan says. For instance, the use of low-impact development should be required by the city and county. Zoning should ensure that the areas most important to the recharge of groundwater are protected from adverse impacts. In all, the plan identifies 23 activities as short-, medium- and long-term goals.

For more information on the sprinkling ordinance and on the conservation plan, go to [www.ci.waukesha.wi.us/WaterUtility](http://www.ci.waukesha.wi.us/WaterUtility).

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