

CLCA Statement on Landscape Water Conservation

Approved by the CLCA Board of Directors on December 3, 2014.

The California Landscape Contractors Association enthusiastically supports the growing movement to make our state's landscapes more sustainable. We also pledge to help shape and accelerate those efforts. Urban landscapes, like all development, should meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Landscapes Enhance Environment and Quality of Life

We know that landscapes are essential to the quality of life in our urban communities. They produce oxygen; clean our air; cool our buildings; capture, filter, and recharge groundwater; and screen out noise. They beautify and soften harsh settings, provide fire protection, produce locally grown food, and give us opportunities for many kinds of outdoor recreation. They serve as islands of refuge for wildlife as well as people by replacing ecosystems lost to development. For all of these reasons, they represent sizable investments and add tremendous value to properties and communities.

Water Conservation Must Become a Way of Life

These same landscapes, however, typically use water—and sometimes a lot of it. Approximately one-third of all urban water use and one-half of residential use are directed to landscape irrigation. Water is a precious natural resource, and we must be careful about how we use it. As the preface to California's 20x2020 Water Conservation Plan states, "With a burgeoning population and the movement of that population to drier climates, our overall demand for water has exceeded our reliable developed supply. Without additional action, demand will continue to exceed supply. The Delta is in crisis, drought has depleted our reservoirs, and groundwater resources are overdrafted. Our need to pursue conservation and eliminate unnecessary uses of water is more important than ever to ensure the future health of our state."

As we write this, California is in the third year of a very severe drought that some weather experts believe may continue into 2015. Water supplies are dangerously low in many communities, which makes it especially imperative to make sure our landscapes are using as little water as possible.

CLCA Supports Transformation to New Norm Landscape

Landscapes that enhance the quality of our lives while being environmentally sensitive have been called many things over the years: xeriscapes, California-friendly landscapes, and sustainable landscapes—to mention only a few. The California Urban Water Conservation Council's "New Normal" or "New Norm" concept is the most recent way of thinking about such landscapes. As outlined in a 2014 report, the New Normal is meant to be a system-wide upgrade to the urban environment that includes reduced outdoor irrigation, abatement of dry-season runoff, rainwater capture and storage, stormwater

reduction and capture, reduced pesticide application and runoff, reduced greenwaste, reduced energy use and green house gas emissions, and provision of food and habitat for beneficial insects and wildlife. The council hopes to use market transformation principles to make this envisioned landscape a commonplace reality—the New Norm. CLCA supports this market transformation, which is already occurring as a response to the drought and for other reasons. Moreover, the association will encourage its members to address this demand for a new type or style of environmentally-sensitive landscaping, whatever term is used to describe it.

Efficiency Is Still Key

Whatever the landscape type or style, CLCA members know that the key to landscape water conservation is water-efficient design, installation, and management. A water-efficient landscape design ideally includes a grading plan, landscape plan, and irrigation plan as described in the state's Model Water-Efficient Landscape Ordinance (Model Ordinance) <http://www.water.ca.gov/wateruseefficiency/landscapeordinance/>. This design should be accompanied by a water budget that at least meets local requirements. The installer of the project should follow the plans and specifications of the design, unless field changes are necessary, use quality irrigation products, meet construction standards skillfully, and make sure the irrigation system is performing correctly at project completion. And finally, the person who manages the landscape should monitor water use in relation to the budget, perform routine inspections, adjust the irrigation schedule according to weather demands if the controller is not weather or soil-moisture based, and adjust and repair the irrigation system and its components.

In truth, the management of an existing landscape can be more important in saving water than its design or construction. In 2003 CLCA commissioned a study by John Whitcomb on "Urban Commercial, Industrial, and Institutional Landscape Water Use and Efficiency in California" http://www.clca.org/clca/legislation/Landscape_Use_1.pdf. It showed no correlation between sites that were overwatered and those with a high percentage of turfgrass, a "thirsty" plant. Clearly, inefficient irrigation management practices were a big part of the problem.

In summary, water-efficient design, installation, and especially management are far more important in saving water than the adoption of any particular style or type of landscape. They should not be overlooked in the enthusiasm for the landscape style of the moment.

Public Policymakers Have Big Role to Play

Urban water suppliers, local governments, and the state of California have important roles to play in encouraging this transition to sustainable, water-efficient landscapes. The ability to measure consumption is a critical first step in any water conservation effort, and therefore all urban water connections without water meters should be retrofitted with them as soon as possible. In addition, dedicated, landscape-only meters should be considered for large landscapes of all kinds, including residential landscapes. Rebate programs for water-efficient irrigation technologies and plantings should be expanded. New residential, commercial, and public developments should be plumbed for reclaimed water, if such water is available. Building standards and codes should make it as easy as possible to install safe graywater and rainwater capture systems.

New water conservation technologies and plants will not achieve their potential, however, unless owners are motivated economically to water efficiently. Unfortunately, current water pricing does not generally reflect the true cost of water. Therefore, it is imperative for many water agencies to replace their rate structures with those that encourage efficient use.

CLCA believes that landscape water conservation rate structures are the most efficient and equitable way to reduce outdoor water waste and reward efficiency in urban settings, not only during times of water shortage, but also when water is seemingly plentiful. Landscape water conservation rate structures are a type of tiered rate structure that takes into account the size of the landscape and local weather, or reference evapotranspiration (ET_o). Typically a dedicated, landscape-only meter is required to measure the water used outdoors, but landscape water conservation rate structures also can be used in combination with other allocation-based rate structures in certain situations, in which case the need for a dedicated landscape meter can be avoided. A good landscape water conservation rate structure includes penalty rates for outdoor water use in excess of a specific percentage of ET_o as well as discounts from the base water rate for customers who use less than a specific percentage of ET_o. A proper landscape water conservation rate structure should be revenue neutral. Any excess revenues should be used for education, technical assistance, and rebates for the installation of water-saving technology to help water users become successful in applying no more water on their landscapes than is necessary.

In addition, cities and counties should get serious about enforcing The Water Conservation in Landscaping Act, which requires local governments to have and presumably enforce a water-efficient landscape ordinance similar to the state's Model Ordinance or one that is "at least as effective in saving water." The Model Ordinance provides an excellent, landscape-industry supported structure for planning, designing, installing, and managing water-efficient landscapes in new construction and renovated projects.

Finally, we urge urban water suppliers to appoint groups of local landscape professionals and interested stakeholders to review existing and proposed conservation requirements. Sometimes called landscape advisory committees, these groups have been used successfully by several urban water suppliers to improve communication and develop demand management measures that work for everyone.

Drought

CLCA understands that public officials may have to take drastic actions during a severe drought if water supplies are at dangerously low levels. In such dire situations, we ask public officials to consult with landscape industry professionals to find ways to keep the most valuable plants alive and as many landscape industry jobs as possible intact. The association applauds the State Water Resources Control Board for its 2014 emergency outdoor water use regulations, which appropriately place a big target on irrigation runoff and allow water suppliers with allocation-based rate structures to apply for an exemption from other required actions.

Conservation Alone Will Not Work

Local and statewide policymakers must use all the tools in their toolboxes to address water supply and demand imbalances if our state is to continue growing and prospering—not just the demand management tool. These include maintaining and improving our water supply infrastructure.

Turfgrass

This brings us to the difficult subject of turfgrass. Lawns have played a prominent and cherished role in California's landscapes for many decades, and for good reason. Unfortunately, turfgrass is a high-water-use plant on a relative basis, and worse, it is easily overwatered. CLCA calls for common sense and compromise on this subject. Property owners should give thought to whether a smaller lawn or one with native or drought-resistant grasses would improve their landscapes for aesthetic, functional, economic, and environmental reasons. CLCA members can be very helpful to property owners in weighing the many factors that should be considered as well as offering solutions.

Plants in General

CLCA encourages the use of climate-appropriate plants, especially those that require less water than more traditional ornamentals. CLCA applauds organizations that have created public gardens to demonstrate how to use these plants in creative and beautiful ways.

Nurseries should label plants for retail sale according to their water use needs. More research should be done regarding plant water needs, and the Water Use Classification of Landscape Species (WUCOLS) <http://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS/> should be reviewed and updated regularly.

Always Hire a Licensed Contractor

Property owners should always hire a licensed landscape contractor when contracting out for the installation of a landscape, especially water-efficient landscapes. Licensed landscape contractors are also allowed by law to design the landscapes they build. The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) tests, licenses, and regulates landscape contractors to protect consumers. All contractor members of CLCA are licensed, although consumers should still check license status on the CSLB website <http://www.cslb.ca.gov> before hiring any contractor. To find CLCA-member contractors who work in any particular area of the state, go to the Contractor Search <http://member-clca.org/max/4DCGI/directory/contractor/index.html> page of the CLCA website.

Certified Water Managers Keep Landscapes Looking Their Best While Saving Water

Many licensed landscape contractors also perform landscape maintenance—usually commercial, public works, or large residential maintenance. Because of CLCA's concern about landscape overwatering, the association created a certification program for landscape water managers. The certified water managers have passed a written test on water-efficient landscape irrigation, performed a landscape irrigation audit, and met an assigned water budget for at least one landscape site for a full year. To remain certified, they must continue to meet a water budget on at least one project. CLCA's Water Management Certification program is EPA-Water Sense labeled. Property owners can locate nearby firms that employ a certified water manager by going to the Certification

Look-Up http://clca.org/consumers/employees_certified-map.php page on the CLCA website and clicking on the desired geographical area on the California map. Companies with a blue program logo have at least one certified water manger on staff.

CLCA

CLCA is a non-profit trade organization of licensed landscape and landscape-related contractors. Also included among our membership are landscape suppliers, landscape architects, landscape designers, public officials, and students.

The association encourages property owners and policymakers to use our association as a resource when it comes to landscape water conservation. CLCA's website http://clca.org/consumers/consumers_home.php# offers water conservation tips under the Save Water tab. Our volunteer leaders and staff look forward to constructive discussions with policymakers in the effort to make California's landscapes more water efficient.

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