

Aurora sees 'incredible compliance' from residents

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In the three months since the Aurora City Council passed a Stage 1 drought declaration and watering restrictions, Aurora Water is seeing "incredible compliance" from residential properties. But the agency hopes to see more cooperation from others, especially commercial users.

Aurora has been under a Stage 1 Water Shortage declaration since early April, when the council unanimously approved outdoor watering restrictions.

Residential water users have largely complied with those restrictions, but commercial users and HOAs are not all on board, Aurora Water spokesperson Shonnie Cline told The Denver Gazette.

The city's constant default restrictions limit residential turf irrigation to three days per week. Under Stage 1 restrictions, outdoor irrigation is limited to two days per week, according to the city's Water Shortage Response plan.

If the city were to enter Stage 2, watering would be limited to one day per week. No outdoor watering is allowed under Stage 3.

A Stage 1 shortage declaration imposes restrictions on outdoor watering for residents and businesses and reduces commercial user allocations, such as that for golf courses, by 20%, according to Aurora Water General Manager Marshall Brown.

This year's drought pushed officials to ramp up enforcement of water restrictions.

Water users who violate the restrictions get one warning. A second violation results in a \$250 fine for residential users and \$500 fine for commercial users, and a third violation results in a \$1,000 fine for residential users and a \$2,000 fine for commercial users.

After that, Aurora Water can continue fining at the third level or shut water off to the user.

Year-to-date, Aurora Water has issued 1,280 warnings to residential property owners, 171 warnings to commercial and industrial properties and 300 warnings to multifamily properties.

Aurora Water has issued 27 fines for residential properties, with three second-level violations and no third-level violations, Cline said, calling it "incredible compliance."

Meanwhile, there is still work to be done when it comes to HOAs and commercial and industrial water users. While many commercial property owners and HOAs are complying with the regulations, not all of them have been.

For commercial properties, Aurora Water has issued 111 first-level violation fines, 20 second-level and seven third-level. This means there are seven commercial users who are now subject to having their irrigation water shut off if they continue to violate the restrictions.

Aurora Water declined to identify those seven users.

Given recent water data, Aurora Water could go to the council and recommend enacting a Stage 2 Water Shortage, Cline said.

The agency has not made that recommendation yet and officials are not sure if it will. If everyone follows the Stage 1 watering restrictions, the chances of going into Stage 2 are lower, Cline said. After a record-low snowpack year, the coming winter's snowpack will greatly dictate next year's water outlook, she added, saying that if Colorado gets another bad snow year, the chances of going into later stages of water restrictions are much higher.

Entering Stage 2 is not a decision Aurora Water officials take lightly, Cline added. Under Stage 2, businesses like car washes can be impacted financially, so water officials try to do everything in their power to keep the city from reaching that point.

It takes a village, Cline said. The more compliance they get with watering restrictions, the less likely harsher water restrictions will be.

"This is one of those times when the community has to come together and look out for each other," Cline said in May. "We don't know how long this is going to last, and the last thing we want is for this to get to a place where we are limited to only indoor water use or even worse. This is the best way for you to care for and love your neighbors right now."