

Stricter water rules in store  
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RALEIGH -- The City Council adopted water restrictions Tuesday that landscapers and nursery owners said could put them out of business but that officials say still may not be enough.

The rules, the strictest Raleigh has on the books, will be felt immediately by people who make a living from lawns and landscaping, many of whom crowded council chambers Tuesday. The so-called "Stage 2" rules ban pressure-washing and all remaining irrigation and sharply restrict builders from testing new city water connections -- tests that must occur before homes and businesses can legally be occupied.

Rick Poole, co-owner of Raleigh-based Four Seasons Landscaping & Maintenance, has had to lay off most of his 20 employees. The two he has kept on are mainly greasing lawn mowers and doing maintenance, he said.

"The drought is the trigger, but the restrictions are the death knell," Poole said.

Officials say the rules, effective Feb. 15, are likely to trim at most 5 percent from the city's consumption. The rules apply to customers in Raleigh, Knightdale, Rolesville, Wake Forest, Wendell, Zebulon and Garner.

The council last took steps to curtail water use on Oct. 23, and officials hoped winter rains would replenish Falls Lake to the point that harming businesses wouldn't be necessary. With Falls Lake less than a third full in early February, the council said it had no choice.

"Given where we are, if the drought persists the lake will not be full by May 1," Mayor Charles Meeker said.

## stricter water rules

May 1 is traditionally when Raleigh enters its peak water use season, with many customers irrigating outdoors and turning on commercial air conditioners that use water. As of Tuesday, the city had 110 days of water supply remaining in Falls Lake.

With virtually all outside watering about to be banned, it's unclear what the next step will be if the drought continues through the summer.

The city has no water conservation ordinances beyond Stage 2. City staff members are working on Stage 3 restrictions, but they are still debating what those might include.

"For the next three to five months, we'll be solely focused on implementing Stage 2," Meeker said.

## The face of a crisis

Landscapers are bracing for the worst.

On Tuesday, more than 300 landscapers, nursery workers and other workers in related jobs came to the council meeting. They rolled into downtown Raleigh with their lawn maintenance vans and landscaping trucks, loaded with bushes and pansies.

The goal: Put a face to an industry worth \$8.6 billion statewide that workers say is being disproportionately hit by watering restrictions.

Joe Stoffregen, president of Homewood Nursery & Garden Center, said in the 40 years his family has operated in North Raleigh, he could not recall facing a crisis as severe as this one.

"The city of Raleigh counts the days of water they have left," Stoffregen said. "We're essentially counting the amount of money we have left to operate."

Dale Crisp, Raleigh's utilities director, estimated the Stage 2 rules could save 1 million to 2 million gallons of water a day. Two million gallons a day would be less than 5 percent of the water system's consumption, which has averaged 40.7 million gallons a day over the past month.

The council included an exemption in the Stage 2 ordinance for developers who recapture the water they use to test city water connections. The exemption was one of several conservation proposals put forward by the Raleigh-Wake County Home Builders Association.

"I think it's making the best of a trying situation," said Tim Minton, the association's executive vice president.

Developers will have to pay to rent a tanker truck and take the water back to Raleigh's water treatment plant. "The big challenge will be finding enough trucks to take the water back to the city," Minton said.

The Feb. 15 date adopted by the City Council is almost two weeks earlier than several council members had recommended last week. But some see the action as too little, too late, saying officials should have banned nonessential uses of drinking water late last summer.

Dean Naujoks, who works for the Neuse River Foundation, criticized Raleigh leaders Tuesday for failing to restrict water use when the drought first hit last summer.

"We were just in a drought two years ago," Naujoks said during a meeting in Raleigh of several dozen local, state and federal drought managers. "Raleigh has not been very proactive. ... Granted, the weather has a lot to do with it. But when are we going to do things differently?"

Naujoks also blamed the Army Corps of Engineers, which runs Falls Lake, for not forcing Raleigh to cut its water consumption.

"Where was the Corps back in June and July saying, 'Raleigh, you need to do more about conservation?'" he asked.

Terry Brown, the Corps' water control manager for Falls Lake, said his agency can't legally tell Raleigh how to manage its allocation from the reservoir.

"How they use it is their business," Brown said.

Naujoks shot back: "It's not just Raleigh's business. It's a public resource that you're in

charge of managing. It's not yours. It's not Raleigh's. It's a public resource."

(Staff writer Matthew Eisley contributed to this report)

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## STAGE 2: A CLOSER LOOK

The rules the City Council adopted Tuesday:

- Prohibit the use of public water for irrigation.
- Prohibit filling new swimming or wading pools. Water may be added to pools to maintain sanitary operating conditions. Filling of pools drained for repair is prohibited.
- Prohibit washing vehicles at any location, except at car-washing facilities that have been certified by the city to be in compliance with the requirements of the conservation certification program. A placard issued by the city must be displayed at the car-wash facility. Also, the city may approve the washing of some vehicles for sanitary purposes (such as solid waste trucks).
- Prohibit washing of areas such as sidewalks, patios, decks, driveways, parking lots, streets and exterior building surfaces, except for soiled areas for the maintenance of public health and sanitary conditions.
- Require that leaking water services or plumbing be repaired within 24 hours of written notification by the city's public utilities director or service will be interrupted.
- Prohibit the serving of drinking water in restaurants, except upon request.
- Prohibit all nonessential water use for commercial or public use.

**stricter water rules**

**- Prohibit use of water-cooled air conditioners or other equipment that does not recycle cooling water, except when health and safety are adversely affected.**

**- Require innkeepers to ask guests spending more than one night to use their towels and bed linens more than once between laundering.**

**- Direct commercial and industrial customers to review water uses and implement industry-specific best management water conservation practices.**

**Julie Leonard, the grower for Campbell Road Nursery in Raleigh, paints the side of the company truck outside the Raleigh Municipal Building. She was among hundreds at Tuesday's council meeting whose livelihoods will suffer because of the water restrictions.**

**Staff Photo by Corey Lowenstein**