

# WATER SHORTAGE WATCH

*Keeping an Eye on Water Supply*

## Frequently Asked Questions about the 2010 - 2011 Water Shortage

South Florida experienced a record-setting dry period that stretched from October 2010 through mid-June 2011. The annual wet season — which delivers 70 percent of our region's rainfall each year — has provided some relief from drought conditions. However, groundwater and lake levels in some areas, while recovering, remain below average for this time of year.

Florida's natural environment is one of extremes, swinging from excessive rains to drought every few years. The biggest challenge faced by residents of South Florida is learning to use water wisely so we have ample supplies through the natural dry cycles.

Water conservation is the best way to stretch our regional water supply in preparation for the next dry season. As a result, landscape irrigation restrictions remain in place throughout the South Florida Water Management District's 16-county region. South Florida lawns typically need only 3/4 to 1 inch of water per week, which can be delivered primarily from rain during the summer months.

For more information about the current water shortage and water restrictions, visit the South Florida Water Management District website, [www.sfwmd.gov/waterwatch](http://www.sfwmd.gov/waterwatch).

### **Q: I water my lawn from a well, canal, pond or surface lake. Do these restrictions apply to me?**

**A:** Yes. Surface and groundwater sources are connected so removing water from one source affects the others. Water in lakes and canals helps to protect private and public wells from saltwater intrusion, and stores rainfall to recharge wells and aquifers.

### **Q: Can I hand water my lawn?**

**A:** Yes. You can hand water stressed plants using a single hose with an attached automatic shut-off or trigger nozzle at anytime.



**Q: Is low-volume watering allowed?**

**A:** Yes. Low-volume irrigation that applies water directly to root plant zones, including drip, bubble and micro-jet systems, and watering cans may be used anytime. Water collected in cisterns and rain barrels may also be used for irrigation anytime. Low-volume irrigation should not produce water runoff.

**Q: When can I wash my car or boat?**

**A:** Anytime. Vehicle washing is not restricted, but voluntary conservation is encouraged. When washing a car, park it over a non-paved or porous surface to reduce water runoff and always attach an automatic shut-off or trigger nozzle to your hose. Limit boat rinsing to 15 minutes after it has been in salt water.

**Q: When can I use a water pressure washer?**

**A:** Anytime. Pressure washing is not restricted. Use low-volume equipment that produces water pressure of 1,000 pounds per square inch to 4,000 pounds per square inch. Channel runoff water onto the grass or another non-paved surface.

**Q: How do I know if my sprinklers are running at the correct times?**

**A:** If you live in a neighborhood or subdivision with a homeowners association, the property manager is typically responsible for setting timers so that the sprinklers run only during the days and times allowed by water restrictions. Some associations and home owners hire a professional irrigation company to monitor and set their sprinkling systems. The District does not perform maintenance on private or public irrigation systems.

**Q: How often should I irrigate my lawn?**

**A:** Proper irrigation is based on the amount of water each lawn needs. Lawns and landscapes typically need to receive only three-quarters to an inch of water each week. This usually means a maximum of two hours of irrigation per week, or a maximum of 15 minutes per irrigation zone for each water application. The lawn may not need to be watered at all if it has rained during the week.

**Q: Who can I contact if my neighbor or homeowners association violates the water restrictions?**

**A:** You can report water restriction violations to your local code enforcement office or law enforcement agency. Both have the authority to issue warnings and/or citations, which can lead to fines. A [list of code enforcement contacts](#) in South Florida is available online. Officials must witness a violation to issue a warning or citation, so it is important to provide as much information as possible about the location, days and times of the violation when you report it. If you choose to notify law enforcement, please call their non-emergency phone number.

**Q: Is there an exemption from water restrictions for irrigation systems with rainfall shut-off devices and/or soil sensors?**

**A:** During a declared water shortage, like the one now affecting South Florida, there is no exemption from water restrictions for residents and businesses with irrigation systems that include water conserving

equipment such as soil sensors, rainfall shut-off devices and evapotranspiration controllers. You may irrigate only during the days and times allowed by current water restrictions. Since 1991, Florida has required that a rainfall shut-off device be installed with new sprinkling systems.

**Q: Why are water shortage restrictions still in effect?**

**A:** The Lake Okeechobee level and groundwater levels remain very low for this time of year, suggesting that enhanced water conservation is needed so there is enough water for the next dry season.

**Q: What is saltwater intrusion?**

**A:** Shallow aquifers that provide drinking water to millions of coastal residents can be threatened by saltwater intrusion during a water shortage. Normally, there is enough eastward movement of underground freshwater to prevent saltwater from entering the Biscayne aquifer on Florida's South East Coast. When the eastward flow of freshwater is reduced, seawater can move into freshwater wells. Saltwater intrusion makes wells unusable for drinking water supplies.

**Q: Why is canal water sometimes released to tide?**

**A:** Many communities, particularly east of I-95, quickly flood following sudden rainfall. Even if it doesn't look as if your neighborhood is in danger of flooding, communities upstream or downstream may need flood relief that can only happen if water levels in canals are low enough to accommodate runoff. The South Florida Water Management District is always exploring options to reduce the amount of water released to tide, but this is a normal part of critical flood control operations.

**Q: Who is responsible for water releases from Lake Okeechobee?**

**A:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages the Lake Okeechobee water level with the goal of balancing flood control, public safety, navigation, water supply and ecological health. The Corps bases operational decisions – whether to retain or release water in the 730-square-mile lake – on its regulation schedule and the best available science and data provided by its staff and a variety of partners, including the South Florida Water Management District.

**Q: Why is water sometimes discharged from Lake Okeechobee into the estuaries during a water shortage?**

**A:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may provide water west to the Caloosahatchee River and east to the St. Lucie River to adjust the salinity in downstream estuaries. Plant and animal life in the estuaries, including oysters and sea grasses, cannot survive in water with salinity above or below their tolerance level. The Corps manages water releases, continuously monitors the effects of releases on the estuaries and confers with its partner agencies and stakeholders to modify releases to minimize impacts to coastal waters.