

Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance:

California's guide to new or renovated landscape requirements

What is the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO)?

MWELO is a statewide water efficiency law for new and renovated landscapes in California. It sets limits on high water use plants and irrigation equipment and incentivizes a holistic approach to landscaping that incorporates healthy soils, adapted plants and alternative water supplies like graywater, harvested rainwater, and recycled water.

PLACEHOLDER

Why is MWELO needed?

Traditionally designed landscapes incorporate plants and irrigation that use too much or waste water; contribute to polluted water runoff into streams, lakes, and the ocean; overspray causing water damage to buildings, fences, streets; and create a lot of pruning, mowing and trimming green waste.

Sustainable landscapes can be beautiful and functional. Research shows that creating and maintaining landscapes that meet MWELO use 80% less water; require 60% less maintenance; produce 50% less yard waste.

Several studies show that sustainable landscaping increase property values by up to 7%; increase wellbeing compared to lawns, increase willingness for consumers to spend more, stay longer, pay more for parking and travel further to those landscaped commercial sites; and is what homeowners really want at their own homes. In 2010, Donovan and Butry found that homes with street trees in front increased the sale between \$7,000 to \$13,000 – the closer the tree to house the more value added.

PLACEHOLDER

Does using less water mean landscapes need to be rocks and cactus?

No, the ordinance encourages the use of a variety of plants including natives and climate-appropriate plants. Lawns and other non-adapted plants can be planted as long as the water budget is not exceeded.

Who needs to comply?

Any single-family or multi-family residential, public, institutional, or commercial project that requires a permit, plan review or check from the local or regional review agency AND meets one of these size thresholds:

\*New construction project with a total landscape area greater than 500 sq. ft.

\*Rehabilitation of existing landscape with a total landscape area greater than 2,500 sq. ft.

\* Some exceptions apply – see ordinance for details.

Landscape areas include swimming pools, fountains, and other water features.

How does your project comply?

There are two compliance pathways:

\*Performance Pathway: new construction projects 500 sq. ft. or larger or rehabilitated landscapes 2,500 sq. ft. or larger.

\*Prescriptive Pathway: projects between 500 sq. ft. and 2,500 sq. ft.

What is the review and approval process?

Performance Pathway Requirements:

Prior to construction, submit a signed Landscape Documentation Package that includes:

\*Project Information. Download the Performance Pathway Checklist.

\*Water Efficient Landscape Worksheet/Water Budget Calculator.

\*Soil Management Report.

\*Landscape Design Plan along with Plant Legend, Specifications, Details and Notes.

\*Irrigation Design Plan along with Specifications, Details and Notes.

\*Grading Design Plan along with Specifications, Details and Notes.

After the project is approved, construct the landscape according to the approved plans. Once completed submit the Certificate of Completion. Use the Certificate of Completion. It includes:

\*Project Information.

\*Certificate of Installation.

\*As-built drawings if major changes occurred after approval.

\*Irrigation diagram showing hydrozones.

- \*Irrigation scheduling parameters.
- \*Landscape and Irrigation Maintenance Schedule.
- \*Irrigation Audit Report.
- \*Soil Management Report (if not submitted before plan approval).
- \*Verification of soil report recommendation implementation.

Prescriptive Pathway:

Use the Prescriptive Submittal Checklist.

Prior to construction, submit a signed Landscape Documentation Package that includes:

- \*Project Information.
- \*Landscape Design Plan.

After the permit/review is approved, construct the landscape according to the approved plans. Once completed submit the Certificate of Completion. Use the Certificate of Completion. It includes:

- \*Certificate of Installation.
- \*Irrigation Schedule.
- \*Schedule of Landscape and Irrigation Maintenance.

Additional MWELo Resources:

\*MWELo Guidebook & Ordinance – California Department of Water Resources. [www.water.ca.gov/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency](http://www.water.ca.gov/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency).