



Frequently Asked Questions: Mandatory Non-Essential Outdoor Water Restrictions

Why do we have water restrictions so late in the season?

The Town of Needham is required to implement emergency outdoor restrictions when the state declares a drought emergency under the Town's new registration with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's (MA DEP) Water Management Act (M.G.L. c. 21G). Every 10 years the Town must file a registration renewal with the MA DEP. It's most recent renewal was effective April 8, 2023 which expires April 8, 2033. Compliance with this requirement was required by April 8, 2025. Drought declarations occur year round, however, outdoor water use is not high during the late fall/winter/early spring period of time.

If we get a lot of rain soon, will we still be in a drought emergency?

The declaration is based on current conditions, stream flows, and prior months precipitation. Needham may be currently experiencing seasonable rainfall but that does not mean the waterways and ground water levels have been fully replenished from being depleted earlier in the year. The declaration comes from the Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force (DMTF) and not the Town. The Town is required to comply with the DMTF's [declaration](#).

How long will the water restrictions last?

At present, the DMTF meets monthly. The Town will update information on water restrictions as soon as the DMTF makes their declarations official. Updated information on restrictions will be posted to www.needhamma.gov/waterrestrictions and on signage posted throughout Town.

Does the Town also have to follow the outdoor use water restrictions for watering grass and other uses?

Yes, the Town has to follow the restrictions, however, there are some exemptions. The Parks and Forestry Division will not irrigate non-sports fields, only sports fields under their exemption. If the Town is at a Level 2 water restriction, the Town Common will be affected as it is not a sports field. The Town maintains turf on playing fields as a safety measure to help prevent concussions and potential injuries for players who may fall, which is why sports fields are exempt.

Why does Needham have water restrictions and Newton doesn't? Don't both communities get their water from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)?

Needham's water supply comes from both the Town's wells and the MWRA. The Town primarily uses Town well water but supplements with MWRA water in the summer to support irrigation usage. The City of Newton only receives its water from the MWRA and is not subject to the same restrictions as Needham. The only time the City of Newton would be subject to restrictions is if the MWRA reservoirs are depleted beyond a multiyear storage capacity. Under the current requirements of the WMA, the Town must comply with any drought declarations regardless of whether the Town buys its supplemental water with MWRA.

Why is the Town flushing the fire hydrants when we have outdoor use water restrictions, isn't that a waste of water?

Flushing of the Town's water distribution system is an important function of maintaining Needham's water quality. Having quality drinking water supersedes the restriction as it is an essential need.

Can I apply for an exemption for water restrictions?

Yes, the application to request an exemption can be found at www.needhamma.gov/waterrestrictions. Even if the Town isn't currently under a restriction, residents are encouraged to complete the application as a water restriction could be declared at another point throughout the year.

If I already got an exemption in the spring do I need to reapply for one again in September?

Yes. Please submit an application which can be found at www.needhamma.gov/waterrestrictions.

What am I supposed to do with my irrigation system?

Residents should become familiar with their irrigation systems to learn how to turn them on and off when necessary and, for those that are programmable, to reprogram it to conform to the restriction. If you have your system serviced, the options for this year are:

- System off with full restriction
- 1 day per week with level 1 restriction (Sundays Only)
- Water as normal with best water management practices which can be found on the Town's website: <https://www.needhamma.gov/waterconservation>

Can I use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to water my lawn?

Under Water Restriction Levels 1 and 2, you may use drip irrigation or soaker hoses but not under Levels 3 and 4.

Are drought-tolerant or native plants exempt from restrictions?

No, but new plantings may be considered an exemption.

Can I wash my car at home?

No, outdoor cleaning using water is not permitted under these restrictions.

Are commercial landscaping companies allowed to water?

Landscapers may apply for an exemption for watering new shrubs ,flowers, and grass.

What about water use for construction purposes like dust control or concrete mixing?

Under the restrictions set forth by the state, these uses would be allowed. The restriction is for non-essential water use and allows for water use that is required by regulation, core to a business function, for agriculture and livestock, and for health and safety.

Who enforces the restrictions and what are the penalties for violations?

The Town of Needham’s Water, Sewer and Drains Division will be enforcing the restrictions. Currently, the Town will not be issuing any fines for violations. The focus will be to educate and inform residents and property owners of the current restrictions so they are in compliance.

What do I do if I see someone in Needham violating the water restrictions? Can I report them anonymously?

You can report violations via phone 781-455-7550 extension 0, by email at dpwadmin@needhamma.gov or via [SeeClickFix](#). The Town’s oversight at this time will be purely informational to educate the public about water restrictions and the need for compliance.

How can I find out what level water restrictions are in place?

You can find this information in the Town’s website at www.needhamm.gov/waterrestrictions as well as on signage posted throughout town.