

# **City of Chico**

## **AB 1881 FAQ**

### ***What is it?***

AB 1881, the Water Conservation in Landscaping Act of 2006, mandated increased water efficiency for both new and existing development statewide. The law required the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to update the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELo) in 2009, to take effect in 2010.

### ***Why was it adopted?***

Landscaping irrigation accounts for half of urban water use in California. With the state's increasing population and the difficulties in developing new water supplies and storage, increased efficiency in the use of landscaping irrigation water is needed.

### ***Does it affect Chico?***

Yes. Previous state legislation regarding water efficiency did not apply to charter cities, but this new legislation specifically does. It applies to both public and private projects. Chico is taking no formal action, which means the MWELo will apply to the City beginning January 1, 2010 as if it had been adopted.

### ***When does it take effect?***

All projects submitting for building permit plan check after January 1, 2010, will be subject to the new requirements if the landscape meets the size requirements listed below.

### ***What type and size of projects does it apply to?***

Every new commercial, multi-family, industrial, or tract home project containing 2,500 s.f. or more of landscaping installed by the developer will be subject to the new MWELo. New landscapes installed by an individual homeowner which are required by code (such as parkway strips, or properties subject to a planned development permit) more than 5,000 s.f. are also subject to the MWELo.

### ***Are any projects exempt?***

Homeowner-installed landscapes which are not required by code and are not subject to site design and architectural review (such as the yard for a typical single-family residence in an R1 zoning district) and use only low voltage electrical connections are exempt from obtaining any sort of permit, and are therefore not required to comply with the new MWELo.

### ***What does it mean for new projects?***

Landscaping plans will need to be prepared by a landscape architect, licensed landscape contractor, or other landscape professional as established in state law. Each project will need to have an

established water budget, planting schedule and irrigation details. There are a number of worksheets which will need to be attached to each new landscaping plan to demonstrate compliance with the MWELo and the water budget for the project, similar to what is currently required to demonstrate compliance with Title 24 energy efficiency requirements.

***What does it mean for existing development?***

All existing landscapes greater than 1 acre in size will be subject to a water audit program, to be managed by Cal Water. Some limited retrofits and/or adjustments will likely be needed for existing large irrigated landscapes. Any existing landscapes less than 1 acre in size are exempt from any audits or retrofits. A number of City parks and other landscaped areas, including some in maintenance districts, are already having their water use monitored by Cal Water.

***How much water can new landscaping use?***

The Maximum Applied Water Allowance (MAWA) is 0.7 of the reference Evapotranspiration (Eto) rate for the local jurisdiction for new development, and 0.8 of the Eto for existing landscaping. Using Chico's reference Eto of 51.7 inches/year, new irrigation systems must be designed and scheduled to use no more than 36.2 inches/year of irrigation water, and existing landscapes greater than one acre should use no more than 41.4 inches/year. One inch of irrigation water is equal to 0.62 gallons per square foot. As an example, 10,000 s.f. of new landscaping would be required to use no more than 224,400 gallons of water (36.2 inches x 10,000 s.f. x 0.62 gallons/inch) per year.

***What are some of the highlights of the new regulations?***

1. New landscapes will need to be divided into hydrozones, with plants requiring similar water usage grouped into appropriate hydrozones.
2. Landscaping consisting primarily of turf (which must be in a high water use hydrozone) generally won't comply with the water limitations in the MWELo. Lawns will need to be smaller and more strategically placed.
3. No sprinklers or other overhead irrigation can be installed within 24 inches of hardscape, or within a landscaped area less than 8 feet wide (such as a parkway strip). All new sprinklers are required to be mounted on swing arms.
4. Any irrigation system applying more than 0.75 inches of irrigation water per hour can't be installed on a slope greater than 25%, unless the toe of the slope is permeable.
5. Sprinklers and other overhead irrigation can only be scheduled between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m.
6. Pre-installation and post-installation soil testing by a laboratory will be required.
7. All plans for projects subject to the MWELo need to be prepared by a Landscape Architect, certified irrigation designer, or other landscape professional authorized to sign plans as provided in state law.
8. Additional water allowance is provided for edible landscapes (e.g., vegetable gardens), parks, and cemeteries.
9. Post-installation certification will be required, which includes a water audit of the installed irrigation system, an irrigation schedule for both establishment and ongoing maintenance, and the results of the post-installation soil analysis.

***Can the City of Chico pass its own ordinance to override the requirements of the MWELO?***

The City has the option of adopting its own ordinance, but it needs to be at least as effective as the MWELO in reducing the use of water for landscape irrigation.

***Where can I find more information?***

Go to DWR's website at [www.water.ca.gov/wateruseefficiency/landscapeordinance/](http://www.water.ca.gov/wateruseefficiency/landscapeordinance/), which contains a variety of materials, including the worksheets and other forms which will need to be submitted with new landscape plans.

***Who can I talk to at the City of Chico about this?***

For more information about Chico's implementation of AB 1881 and the revised MWELO, contact Associate Planner Greg Redeker at (530) 879-6810 or [gredeker@ci.chico.ca.us](mailto:gredeker@ci.chico.ca.us) or Urban Forest Manager Denice Britton at (530) 896-7802 or [dbritton@ci.chico.ca.us](mailto:dbritton@ci.chico.ca.us).