



Metro mulls evening ban on lawn sprinkling

But some directors say change should wait another year

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 10, 2011



Proposed changes to lawn watering rules would eliminate all evening sprinkling beginning June 1.

Photograph by: Getty Images Files, Vancouver Sun

Rain is forecast for the next few days but Metro Vancouver is already talking about further restricting lawn sprinkling across the region this summer.

The regional district is proposing eliminating all evening lawn sprinkling this year, starting on June 1, in an attempt to reduce increasing pressures on the region's water transmission system during hot, dry summer days.

In return, Metro would allow residents to sprinkle their lawns three mornings a week, from 4 a.m. to 9 a.m., instead of the two now provided. Nonresidential customers can water their lawns from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m.

The move -the first change in Metro's water restriction plan in 18 years -is expected to cut water use by 12 per cent during peak hours and by three per cent on peak days, while saving on infrastructure costs.

"During these hot summer days the system really gets taxed," said Metro Vancouver spokesman Bill Morrell. "We're looking at options to knock the top off those peaks."

The plan must be approved by the Metro Vancouver board, and Metro's municipalities, which would have to change their bylaws.

But not all Metro directors are on board with the proposal, noting some municipalities have already issued their water sprinkling calendars for this summer. Others suggested Metro should wait a year so the public can get used to the idea.

The changes would apply only to lawns and not gardens, shrubs, playing fields, golf courses, sports fields and other large public spaces such as parks and turf fields.

"It's extremely rushed to push this when it's already March," said Burnaby Coun. Dan Johnston. "By restricting it to mornings only you're going to piss off a lot of people. It would be better having one day in the morning and one in the evening.

"Our staff is saying this is going to be impossible to enforce for the first couple of years until moral suasion kicks in."

Stan Woods, Metro Vancouver's senior engineer of policy and planning, said sprinkling lawns in the morning is more efficient as air temperatures and winds are generally lower and it is better for the health of the lawn. The move is modelled on a program in Mission and Abbotsford.

The water committee decided to adopt a suggestion by Vancouver Coun. Geoff Meggs that Metro start the program on June 1, but not enforce it until next year.

It also agreed to launch an education campaign to change peoples' lawn sprinkling habits, noting its two-year Tap Water campaign has resulted in a 15 per cent reduction in those drinking bottled water.

"There's certainly been a shift in our messaging for watering your lawns ... just to keep it green is a luxury," Woods said. "What we would prefer is to water lawns more efficiently -once a morning and once a week."

Metro Vancouver hasn't experienced record levels of snowfall this year, but had received 80 per cent of the annual peak snowpack as of March 1, according to the River Forecast Centre, with above-normal snow packs in the Lower Fraser, South Coast and Vancouver Island.

The melting snowpack is collected in the region's three reservoirs -the Seymour and Capilano on the North Shore and the Coquitlam reservoir -before it's treated, filtered and flows out of taps across Metro.

Every day, more than one billion litres of clean, clear water streams out of taps across Metro Vancouver. The Seymour and Capilano watersheds supply up to 70 per cent of Metro's drinking water -mainly to Vancouver, Burnaby and Richmond -while the Coquitlam reservoir serves the Tri-Cities and most homes south of the Fraser.

Surrey Coun. Marvin Hunt noted while Metro Vancouver's reservoirs might be filling up with rain and snow right now, it won't be the same in the middle of July.

"This wonderful illusion we have right now will change when it gets to July and that gets pretty dry," Hunt said.

Municipalities such as Surrey and Langley tend to suffer the most during peak watering hours as those communities are located furthest from the water reservoirs.

In the past, Hunt noted, Surrey didn't have enough water to fight fires.

"As Surrey is at the end of the pipe, we really appreciate the reduction of water use," he said.

Langley Township, which sees 52 per cent of its water come from groundwater wells, put a moratorium on all watering last year because of the conditions. "It depends on issues of drought and how hot it is," Mayor Rick Green said. "We've all got to be more concerned about conservation."

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