

Michael F. Easley
Governor



State of North Carolina
Office of the Governor

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**GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES LEGISLATIVE PLAN TO MODERNIZE WATER SYSTEMS,
MANDATE CONSERVATION AND UPGRADE EMERGENCY RESPONSE**
Unveils SaveWaterNC.org Website to Raise Public Awareness on Drought

RALEIGH – Gov. Mike Easley today announced a three-part legislative package to modernize North Carolina’s public water systems, mandate water conservation and efficiency, and upgrade the response to water emergencies. The governor also unveiled a new website, *SaveWaterNC.org*, aimed at continued water conservation.

“This legislation will help North Carolina’s public water systems improve their services to customers and be better prepared to deal with future droughts, but we also need to change our attitude about using water in North Carolina,” said Easley. “We can not let up on our conservation efforts and that is why today I am announcing a public awareness effort to encourage citizens to save as much water as possible now, make water conservation a way of life in North Carolina and make our state drought proof.”

The governor was joined today by Sec. Bill Ross of the Dept. of Environment & Natural Resources and Secretary Bryan Beatty of the Dept. of Crime Control & Public Safety.

Legislative proposals to modernize the state’s more than 600 public water systems include:

- Local water systems must develop thorough water shortage plans, conduct regular leak detection and repair audits, and move toward conservation based pricing in order to be eligible for state funds for water system improvement projects.
- Priority for state funding will go to projects that improve a community’s ability to manage water supplies during a drought, such as interconnections for drought-prone communities; leak detection projects; upgrades to meters and metering systems to help homeowners and agencies more closely and accurately monitor water consumption; and water re-use facilities that use treated wastewater for landscape irrigation, industrial uses and for other appropriate purposes.
- DENR will get staff and funding to develop a detailed and up-to-date map that shows all water system interconnections, alternative water supplies, groundwater status and other information.
- New outdoor water uses, such as in-ground irrigation, will be required to have meters separate from meters that monitor indoor water use.
- Enhanced enforcement to be sure that business that use more than 100,000 gallons a day register with DENR as required, including penalties for willful non-compliance.
- Identification of all other large water users.
- Requiring monthly water use reports under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act to be submitted electronically instead of on paper and allowing the DENR Secretary to require additional reporting as necessary during periods of drought.

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The governor's legislative package would also make changes that mandate water conservation and efficiency, to include:

- Prohibiting rate structures that cut the rates for users when they use more water.
- Directing DENR to develop guidelines for water rate structures that encourage people to use less water.
- Revising the building code to require water efficient fixtures in new commercial and residential construction
- Adopting water efficiency standards for new in-ground irrigation systems.
- Changing the rules so that household water, or "gray water," from sinks, bathtubs and showers can be used to hand-water trees, shrubs, and plants in a homeowner's yard.

Finally, the legislation would improve the state's ability to respond to water emergencies, including giving the governor more power to take action prior to a declaration of a public health and safety emergency.

Proposals include:

- Giving North Carolina governors the legal authority to order a water system to provide water to a neighboring community in an emergency.
- Requiring communities in extreme and exceptional drought to adhere to minimum water conservation standards developed by the DENR.
- Giving local water agencies in extreme and exceptional drought the authority to impose mandatory water conservation measures to all water users within their jurisdiction, including customers of privately owned water utilities regulated by the state Utilities Commission.
- Enacting a sales tax holiday for the purchase of water saving devices.
- Examining the possibility of incentives to promote efficient water use, which is usually done by local governments.
- Staffing and funding to create an Office of Water Conservation and Efficiency in DENR to more effectively oversee all our water policy, planning and conservation efforts.

The governor also announced a new website aimed at convincing the public to continue saving water to avoid a crisis in the current drought and to instill the need for continued water conservation even when the drought is over.

"We have had some good rains recently, more than we have had in a long time. But when that happens, people tend to forget about the drought," said Easley. "April is the month when water systems statewide begin seeing increased water use due to the growing season and rising temperatures that cause more evaporation, so we need to continue saving water every way we can."

The website, *SaveWaterNC.org*, was developed by the departments of Crime Control & Public Safety and Environment & Natural Resources. The website includes: conservation tips for specific audiences including businesses, homes and schools; examples of successful water saving efforts; links to water conservation information for the state's largest cities; a kid's page; educational links and materials; and interactive tools such as water conservation calculators so people can enter their personal water use and see how much they are saving. The site also gives residents the opportunity to participate in the water saving effort by sending in photos and success stories about water conservation going on in their hometowns.