Non-Functional Turf Toolkit

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LESS LAWN.
MORE SOLUTIONS.
CALIFORNIA
WATER EFFICIENCY
PARTNERSHIP

LESS LAWN
MORE RESOURCES!

AB 1572 Toolkit:

- Outreach toolkit
- Internal Agency toolkit
- Customer-facing website

SECTOR-SPECIFIC MATERIALS

1. General Guidance
2. CII
3. HOA
4. Municipal Governments
5. Property Management Companies
6. Educational Institutions
7. Landscape Company
8. Developers

General Guidance Materials

GENERAL GUIDANCE

LESS LAWN MORE SAVINGS

Fact Sheet:
New Rules for Watering Lawns in California

California law (AB 1572) will prohibit the use of potable (drinking) water to irrigate nonfunctional turf—lawns that serve no recreational or community purpose—at most commercial, industrial, and institutional (CII) properties, including common areas managed by homeowner associations (HOAs).

This fact sheet explains what's changing and how to prepare.

Functional Lawn

Nonfunctional Lawn

WHAT IS NONFUNCTIONAL LAWN?

Nonfunctional lawn refers to irrigated lawn that is ornamental and not regularly used for recreation or public gatherings.

Functional Lawn

- School fields
- Sports fields
- Picnic areas
- Designated play spaces
- Any other areas where people regularly gather, play, or engage in recreational activities

Nonfunctional Lawn

- Lawn in medians, roundabouts, or parking lots
- Decorative strips along sidewalks
- Unused patches near signage or building entries
- Lawn between buildings with no clear use
- Decorative lawn along sidewalks, building edges, or fences
- Sloped or oddly shaped areas that are hard to use or water efficiently

WHAT'S CHANGING

- Many properties will no longer be allowed to use potable water to irrigate lawn that isn't actively used for play, gatherings, or other functional purposes.
- These properties must stop watering lawns by their deadline.

The intent is not to remove all green spaces, but to stop wasting drinking water on unused lawn.

WHO NEEDS TO COMPLY?

- Commercial, industrial, and institutional properties (offices, retail centers, schools, hospitals, etc.)
- Common areas of HOAs
- Public agency landscapes (parks, civic campuses, medians)

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T COMPLY?

Failure to comply with AB 1572's nonfunctional lawn irrigation restrictions can result in civil penalties of up to $500 per day (California Water Code §1846). Enforcement specifics may vary by water agency; please contact your local provider for details.

COMPLIANCE TIMELINE

January 1, 2027
Public properties owned or managed by local governments, including public school districts

January 1, 2028
Commercial, industrial, and institutional properties

January 1, 2029
Common areas managed by homeowner associations, common interest development, and community service organizations

January 1, 2031
Public properties in Disadvantaged Communities, contingent upon available state financial assistance or when state funding for turf replacement becomes available

Note: You are not required to replace lawn by these dates—only to stop irrigating with potable water.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

LESS LAWN MORE SAVINGS

Rebates & Incentives for Replacing Nonfunctional Lawn

Many California water providers offer rebates and incentives to help customers reduce water use, especially when converting a nonfunctional lawn. Whether you're replacing lawn, updating irrigation, or planting water-wise landscapes, many programs are available to help cover costs and provide guidance.

This guide outlines common incentives offered by water providers.

Lawn Replacement Rebates: Get pre-approved to receive money for every square foot of nonfunctional lawn you replace with low-water plants, mulch, or other approved materials.

Irrigation System Upgrades: Rebates may cover drip irrigation parts, weather-based sprinkler timers, high-efficiency sprinkler nozzles, or flow meters.

Tree Rebates: Some agencies help cover the cost of planting new trees, including mulch, compost, and professional installation. Or, some energy utilities offer free shade trees.

Water-Wise Surveys: Many providers offer free Water-Wise Surveys to help identify areas for improvement and recommend water-saving upgrades.

Landscape Design Support: Free site visits, water use evaluations, and advice from certified professionals may be available. Plant lists and other design resources can also be found online at sites like **calscape.org** and **NonFunctionalTurfCA.org**.

Customized Rebate Programs: Some providers offer tailored rebate programs to meet the specific needs of business

GENERAL GUIDANCE

LESS LAWN MORE TREES

Best Practices for Existing Trees During Lawn Conversion

California's new lawn watering rules (AB 1572) were created to help save potable (drinking) water by phasing out its use for irrigating nonfunctional turf—lawns that serve no recreational or community purpose—at most commercial, industrial, and institutional (CII) properties, including common areas managed by homeowner associations (HOAs). But **removing lawn can affect nearby trees**—especially if they're used to regular watering.

This guide explains how to protect your existing trees while creating a more water-wise landscape.

Trees are Worth Protecting

Trees offer big benefits for neighborhoods and the environment—often saving more water than they use.

- They cool the air and shade streets and property
- They retain soil moisture and reduce runoff
- They filter pollution and support birds, pollinators, and other wildlife
- They add beauty and value to businesses, homes, and communities

Lawn Removal Can Stress Trees

Removing lawn helps save water—but it can hurt trees if done the wrong way. **Be careful to avoid:**

- Damaging roots by digging or scraping anywhere under the tree canopy
- Removing lawn without updating irrigation to keep trees healthy
- Cutting off irrigation too quickly
- Heat stress from replacing lawn with gravel, bare soil, or hard surfaces
- Chemical or soil damage from herbicides used in lawn removal or soil compaction

Lawn Areas That Might Not Meet the New Rules

To comply with the new law, some lawn areas may no longer be allowed to use drinking water for irrigation if they have these characteristics:

- **Too narrow to be used** – less than 10 feet wide
- **Blocked off or fenced** – not easily accessed by people
- **On a steep slope** – difficult to walk on or water efficiently
- **Just for looks** – not used for play, walking, or gathering
- **Near signs or buildings** – with no clear public use

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE BY PROPERTY TYPE

Commercial and Office Sites
ALLOWED: Lawn with picnic benches or used as an outdoor break area
NOT ALLOWED: Lawn in planter strips or narrow borders with no foot traffic

Homeowner Associations and Apartments
ALLOWED: Lawn in courtyards, near play structures
NOT ALLOWED: Lawn along property edges, near entry signs, or between buildings with no access

Schools and Educational Campuses
ALLOWED: Fields, Physical Education areas, or designated outdoor classrooms
NOT ALLOWED: Lawn at drop-off zones, near flagpoles, or around parking lots

Hospitals and Campuses
ALLOWED: Accessible healing gardens or walkable open spaces
NOT ALLOWED: Lawn hidden behind, fences, walls, or not accessible for use

Local Governments and Public Agencies
ALLOWED: Civic lawn used for events or gathering
NOT ALLOWED: Lawn in medians, at facility entrances, or on slopes where use isn't possible

Need Help Reviewing Your Site?

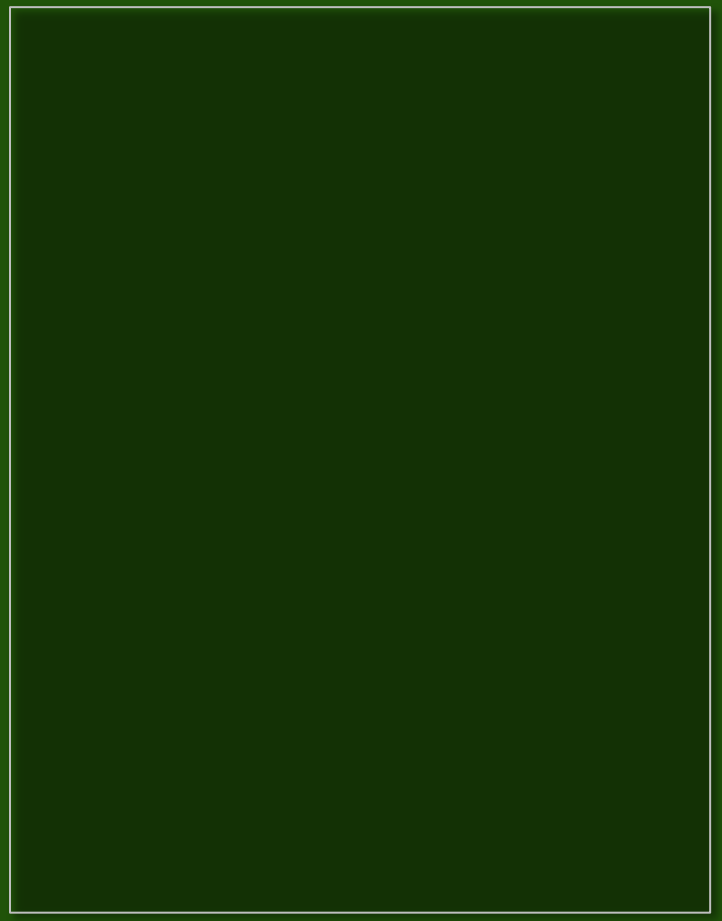
Many water providers offer support to evaluate lawn areas, plan improvements, and access rebates. Services may include site visits, irrigation reviews, guidance on replacing lawn with low-water landscaping, tips for protecting trees during conversion, and tools like plant lists, design templates, or irrigation guides appropriate for your local climate. In addition, professional landscape contractors can help review your site and make sure your project follows the rules while still looking great. Local water agencies or landscape programs may also provide useful resources—like tree protection guidelines, recommended plant lists, sample designs, and planning tools—to make the process easier.

CALIFORNIA WATER EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP

NonFunctionalTurfCA.org

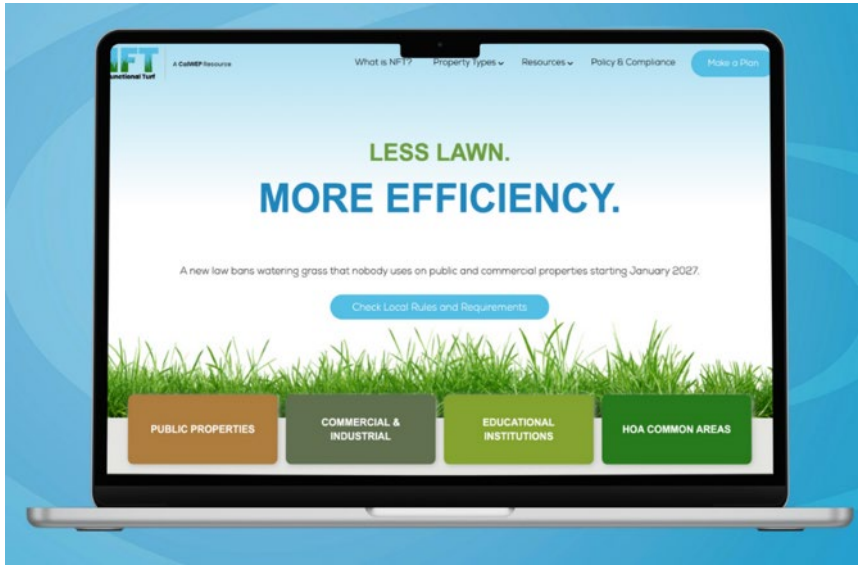
Additional Sector Materials

Internal Agency-Focused Toolkit



LESS LAWN
MORE RESOURCES!

Check out NonfunctionalTurfCA.org



Your one-stop resource for:

🧩 **Quick check:** Do you have non-functional turf?

🌿 **Design ideas & support materials**

💧 **Rebate finder:** find out if there is a rebate program in your area!

📘 **Case studies & FAQs** for real examples

Start today → Transform your turf, save water, and get $$!

Questions? Contact CalWEP

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