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# Maui panel recommends restrictions on watering

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WAILUKU, Maui — A Maui County Council committee yesterday recommended approval of a proposed ordinance that would be the first in the state to limit when residents, resorts and businesses could water their yards.

The measure would restrict watering to three days a week between the hours of 6 p.m. and 9 a.m. and outlaw runoff into streets, gutters and sidewalks. It would apply to water users countywide, including those who rely on private wells and surface water.

Water Resources Committee Chairwoman Michelle Anderson said the bill provides "a common-sense approach" to deal with the problem of water waste from irrigation and would be "fair and equitable to everyone," including resorts worried about maintaining their tropical landscaping.

"I don't think watering only three days a week is going to turn anyone's yard into an Arizona desert," she said.

The restrictions are necessary, the councilwoman said, because of Maui's limited water resources, specifically the 'Iao Aquifer, which supplies water to Central and South Maui, the island's most populated and fastest-growing areas.

She cited studies showing that water levels in the aquifer are dropping, chloride (salt) levels are rising and the transition zone between fresh and salt water in the water table is narrowing.

The state Commission on Water Resource Management took over management of the aquifer when demand threatened the resource, limiting the county to pumping 17 million gallons per day.

County Department of Water Supply Director Jeffrey Eng said the 12-month moving average for pumping dropped from 17.6 mgd a year ago to 15.2 mgd last month after a call for a voluntary 10 percent reduction in water use.

"The community has been responding to our request for conservation, but this is the right thing to do anyway," Eng said after the meeting. "It's been a water free-for-all all these years."

## RESORTS HEAVY USERS

Water conservation consultant Amy Vickers told committee members that similar irrigation ordinances are "a standard mechanism to reduce water waste" around the country. In Florida, which has a climate and tourism-based economy similar to Hawaii's, it's common for irrigation to be limited to twice a week or even once a week in drought-prone areas, she said.

"People are starting to realize we don't really have a choice here. This is the most effective thing you can do to start saving water. For businesses it saves money ... and it forces homeowners, businesses and hotels to look at their irrigation systems and fine-tune them," Vickers said.

Eng told committee members irrigation restrictions are long overdue and necessary for Maui.

"The reality is that until we get new sources developed, and in the case of groundwater, higher water use permits from the state water commission, legislation such as this will be required," he said.

Although not singled out in the bill's language, it was clear from comments during yesterday's committee meeting that the rules are meant, in part, to curb outdoor water use by the luxury resorts and homes in the 1,500-acre Wailea Resort in South Maui.

The water department reported that 42 percent of residential water use in Wailuku and Kahului in Central Maui goes toward outdoor uses, while in South Maui it's closer to 70 percent.

Eng, who used to manage the Ka'anapali Resort's private water system, said outdoor water use in resort communities is closer to 80 percent of total use.

## EDUCATION URGED

Bud Pikrone, general manager of the Wailea Community Association, urged the county to emphasize conservation education programs, which are producing real results.

"I don't see how restricting watering for three days a week is going to make a difference," he told the committee. "People aren't going to buy into that. People are going to find ways to overwater, and we won't have the necessary savings" that is expected.

In a message on the association's Web site, Pikrone stated that irrigation restrictions would have a negative impact on property values and tourism. He also noted that Wailea has cut back watering medians, parks and entry features to four days a week for shorter periods.

"This, along with hardware changes to the entire system, has significantly reduced our usage over the past couple years," his message said.

Anderson denied the proposed restrictions target resorts. "It's across the board. They may feel they're being singled out because they are the highest water user in the county," she told The Advertiser.

Under the proposed ordinance, properties with addresses ending in even numbers would be able to irrigate on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, while odd-numbered properties would be allowed to do so on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

There are no limits on hand-watering using a hose with a nozzle that automatically shuts off when released.

Exemptions include farmers with agricultural water rates, personal food gardens, properties that use drip irrigation, and new landscaping. Also exempt are properties that rely on 100 percent reclaimed water for irrigation, and golf courses, many of which use brackish or reclaimed water.

Violators face fines of up to \$500.

The bill now moves on to the full council for a first reading, and Eng and Anderson said they hope the new irrigation rules will be in effect before the end of the year.

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