



Department of Building Inspection  
1660 Mission Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103-2414



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## *What You Should Know About*

# San Francisco's Water Conservation Requirements for Commercial Buildings



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San Francisco enacted a Commercial Water Conservation Ordinance in 2009 that requires all commercial property owners to provide certain water conservation measures for their buildings by January 1, 2017. The intent of this law is to protect natural resources, address increasing demand for water, and cut greenhouse gas emissions through reduced water use. The required improvements also will reduce water and sewer costs for commercial properties.

It is advantageous for all commercial property owners to comply with the requirements now. Even though the statutory deadline of 2017 may seem far away, the savings in water and sewer costs typically pay for themselves within one to three years. The following information is a summary of the requirements found in Chapter 13A of the San Francisco Building Code (SFBC).

## WHO MUST COMPLY?

On or before January 1, 2017, all owners of:

- Commercial buildings;
- Any portion of a residential building, which is used for commercial purposes;
- Any portion of a residential building converted to a tourist hotel;
- Any portion of a residential building which is occupied as a hotel or motel unit and which has a certificate of use for tourist occupancy;
- Any building or portion thereof which is a live/work occupancy
- Mobile homes.

Owner's compliance is also required when one of the following situations occurs:

- **Building Additions**  
If a building addition will increase the floor area of the building by more than 10 percent, the entire building must comply as a condition for issuance of a Certificate of Final Completion and Occupancy.
- **Building Alterations and Improvements**  
If the cost estimated in a building permit for an alternation or improvement is greater than \$150,000, compliance is required in all facilities that serve the

specific area of alteration or improvement and is a condition for issuance of a Certificate of Final Completion and Occupancy or final permit sign off.

- **Alternations or Improvements to Rooms with Water Conservation Devices**  
If an alteration or improvement of any cost is located in a room that contains a faucet, shower, water closet (toilet), or urinal, compliance is required in that room as a condition for issuance of a Certificate of Final Completion and Occupancy or final permit sign off.

## WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES

On or before January 1, 2017, all owners of commercial buildings and other structures listed above must cause a water conservation inspection to be completed and have a Certificate of Compliance on file with the Department of Building Inspection (DBI) for the entire building or the entire portion of the building subject to Chapter 13A of the SFBC. The ordinance requires the following water conservation measures be complied with as applicable:

- **Low-Flow Showerheads**  
The maximum flow permitted through a showerhead is 2.5 gallons per minute or less. If a showerhead does not meet this requirement, it must be replaced.  
  
All showers may have no more than one showerhead per valve. "Showerhead" includes rain heads, rain tiles or any other fitting that transmits water for the purpose of showering.
- **Faucet and Faucet Aerators**  
An aerator with a flow rate of 2.2 gallons per minute or less is to be installed on all sink faucets. Faucets not designed to accept aerators must be replaced, unless the faucet has a flow rate of 2.2 gallons per minute or less at a working pressure allowed by the plumbing code.
- **Efficient Toilets**  
All toilets must have a rated water consumption of 1.6 gallons per flush or less. If a toilet does not meet this requirement, it must be replaced. Modifications to toilets with rated water consumption greater than 1.6 gallons per

flush do not comply.

A plumbing permit is not required for a simple toilet replacement. However, if alterations to the plumbing system are necessary, a plumbing permit is required. Commercial properties may be exempted from toilet replacements that compromise the historical integrity of the building pursuant to the California Historical Building Code as determined by the Department of Building Inspection.

- **Efficient Urinals**

All urinals must have a rated water consumption of 1.0 gallons per flush or less. If a urinal does not meet this requirement, it must be replaced. Modifications to urinals with a rated water consumption greater than 1.0 gallons per flush do not comply. Commercial properties may be exempted from urinal replacements that compromise the historical integrity of the building pursuant to the California Historical Building Code as determined by the Department of Building Inspection.

- **Leak Repair**

All plumbing leaks must be located and repaired. To determine the existence of leaks, the following is required:

- Visual inspection OR a water meter registration test. If water meter registration is used, compliance is achieved if there is no meter movement for ten minutes while all building fixtures are shut off.
- Fixture leak detection. All tank type toilets must be tested with leak detection dye, and all flushometer type fixtures must be visually checked for proper water operation.

## EARLY COMPLIANCE

Early compliance is encouraged and most new or newly renovated buildings require no water conservation retrofits to comply. Decreased water consumption will reduce water and sewer charges to a level that usually pays for the cost of retrofits in a few months or a few years depending on the amount of water saved. Even if a final Certificate of Compliance for a building is filed with DBI years in advance, the property will have met the January 1, 2017 deadline required by Chapter 13A of the SFBC.

## POSTPONEMENT OF REQUIREMENTS

Application for a demolition permit will allow the postponement of the water conservation requirements for one year. Failure to demolish after one year will require immediate compliance with the water conservation measures.

## HOW TO COMPLY?

- **OBTAIN A WATER CONSERVATION INSPECTION FROM THE DBI'S PLUMBING INSPECTION DIVISION (PID)**  
Payment for the inspection must be made before the report can be released. Call (415) 558-6570, 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM, or visit 1660 Mission St., 3rd floor. These City inspections are limited to conducting only the water conservation inspection. Inspectors will not include other code violations in the report nor can they do any of the work that may be required.
- **COMPLY WITH THE REQUIRED STANDARDS AS SPECIFIED BY THE INSPECTOR IN THE REPORT**  
If retrofit of plumbing fixtures is required, a building owner shall hire someone to perform the work.
- **OBTAIN FINAL COMPLIANCE FROM DBI'S PLUMBING INSPECTION DIVISION**  
Call (415) 558-6570, 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM, or visit 1660 Mission St., 3rd floor to request a final compliance inspection. Once a PID inspector has signed off on required retrofits, a Certificate of Compliance will be issued, provided to the building owner or owner's agent, and filed in DBI's public record for the property.

**NOTE:** In the case of buildings in which water conservation retrofits are required as part of an alteration or improvement to the building or to a room with water conservation devices, and the remaining portions of the building subject to Chapter 13A of the SFBC are not in compliance, a Certificate of Compliance will not be issued for the property. Portions of buildings not in compliance remain subject to the January 1, 2017 deadline and must be inspected, retrofitted, and have a Certificate of Compliance on file with DBI on or before that date.

## SPECIAL APPEALS

A person may appeal the results of a water inspection if:

- There is disagreement regarding the requirements as determined by the inspector;
- The owner wishes to apply for an exemption from installing an efficient toilet or urinal based on impacts to the historical integrity of the building.

There is a fee per Sec. 110, Table 1-N of the SFBC required for the appeal. Appeals must be made to the Department of Building Inspection, within 10 working days from the date the completed inspection form was filed by DBI. The determination of the Director shall be final.



## QUESTIONS

Should you wish further information regarding the water conservation requirements, call DBI's Plumbing Inspection Division, at (415) 558- 6570 between 7:30 AM and 4:00 PM. You may also visit the office at 1660 Mission St., 3rd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103.

For more information on financing options, efficient toilet and urinal rebates, and free water-efficient devices which can help achieve compliance with the water conservation ordinance, please contact the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission at (415) 551-4730 or visit <http://conserve.sfwater.org>.

