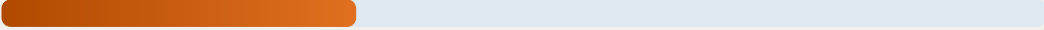


## Our Valley Is Running Dry. And It Is Going to Get Harder.

Drought conditions across the Okanagan are the worst they've been in years. With active restrictions now at all four OC campus communities (Kelowna, Vernon, Penticton, and Salmon Arm), with new restrictions announced just this week, this is what every employee needs to know right now.



Okanagan Lake & watershed reservoir levels, well below seasonal average, June 2026

**55%**

of an average Kelowna home's annual water use goes to outdoor landscaping

**72M**

liters used on Kelowna lawns & gardens every summer, on average

**#1**

The Okanagan has one of the highest per capita water use rates in all of Canada

### PART 1 THE SITUATION

This is not a normal dry summer. The 2026 season arrived with snowpack well below historical norms, a critical challenge for a semi-arid region like ours that depends on seasonal melt to replenish lakes, streams, and reservoirs. The Okanagan Basin Water Board, which monitors regional drought conditions and issues seasonal bulletins, has long flagged that the valley is uniquely exposed to water stress. This year, conditions have validated those warnings faster than most expected.

*"Current conditions in local and regional watersheds are significantly drier than average for this time of year."*

**David Best, Utilities Manager, City of Penticton, April 27, 2026**

The numbers from across the valley tell the story clearly, and every community where Okanagan College operates is now directly affected. Okanagan Lake levels are below seasonal averages. Watershed reservoir levels are down. Municipalities from Salmon Arm to Penticton have escalated formal water restrictions months earlier than typical, and as of June 25 (yesterday), Kelowna joined them with brand new restrictions of its own.

## ACTIVE RESTRICTIONS AT EVERY OC CAMPUS LOCATION:

### KELOWNA (BMID) \* NEW JUNE 25

#### Stage 1 / 2

Mission Creek area: **Stage 1** imposed June 25. Scotty Creek area: **Stage 2** ongoing. Reservoirs released three weeks ahead of schedule.

### VERNON (GREATER VERNON WATER)

#### Stage 3

Escalated June 4, 2026, earlier and more severe than most previous years.

### PENTICTON

#### Stage 2

In effect since May 1, 2026. Targeting a **20% reduction** in overall water use to protect summer supply.

### SALMON ARM

#### Stage 2

Two designated watering days per week. No irrigation 10 a.m.–7 p.m. Fines of \$100 per violation.

The most recent development came just yesterday in Kelowna, where the Black Mountain Irrigation District announced Stage 1 restrictions for its Mission Creek service area on June 25, noting it was forced to release water from upland reservoirs three weeks earlier than normal due to drought conditions. The Scotty Creek service area, which relies partly on groundwater wells to supplement supply, remains at Stage 2. In Salmon Arm, Stage 2 restrictions are in effect city-wide for all residents, businesses, and institutions, with no irrigation permitted between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. and fines starting at \$100 per infraction.

#### **Further escalation is likely.**

The Regional District of North Okanagan is explicit: higher restriction stages can be implemented at any time as conditions change. Peak water demand typically hits in late July and early August, and we are entering that window with reservoirs already depleted. Stage 3 and Stage 4 restrictions mean near-total bans on outdoor water use, with potential impacts to infrastructure and operations.

The scale of the challenge is also a matter of habits. The City of Kelowna's Water Smart program notes that **outdoor irrigation accounts for ~24%** of all water used across the Okanagan, but in an average Kelowna home, that figure jumps to **55%** of total annual water use, amounting to roughly **72 million liters** across the city's lawns and gardens in a single summer. These numbers matter because they tell us where the biggest opportunities are.

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## PART 2 WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

Conservation is not just a personal choice right now. It is a community responsibility. The good news is that both at the college level and at home, there are concrete, meaningful actions we can all take today. Small, consistent changes across a large group add up fast.

### AT OKANAGAN COLLEGE

Report any leaky taps, running toilets, or pipe drips to Facilities immediately.

A slow leak can waste hundreds of liters per day.

Advise Facilities to schedule any campus irrigation systems to run overnight or before 6 a.m. to minimize evaporation loss.

Run dishwashers and laundry machines in campus facilities only on full loads.

Raise xeriscaping and drought-tolerant planting as a priority for future campus landscaping decisions.

Post water conservation reminders in kitchens, washrooms, and common areas, especially in student housing facilities.

Encourage staff and students to bring reusable water bottles rather than relying on single-use cups or running taps.

### AT HOME

Cut showers to 5 minutes or less. A 10-minute shower uses roughly 100 liters.

Turn the tap off while brushing teeth or shaving. A running tap wastes up to 9 liters per minute.

Water your lawn or garden before 6 a.m. or after 9 p.m. to prevent evaporation loss during the heat of the day.

Keep grass at 2.5 inches. Taller grass retains moisture, shades roots, and is far more drought-resistant.

Only run the dishwasher and washing machine with full loads.

Check for and fix dripping taps. Even a slow drip adds up to thousands of liters per year.

### Quick Reference: Home Dos and Don'ts:

#### ✓ DO

- ✓ Water only on your designated restriction days and times
- ✓ Set sprinklers to run a maximum of 20 minutes per spot to allow soil absorption
- ✓ Use a rain barrel to collect water for container plants and flower beds
- ✓ Add mulch around garden beds to reduce moisture evaporation
- ✓ Report visible water waste (sprinklers running midday, broken heads) to your municipality
- ✓ Choose drought-tolerant or native Okanagan plants for any new garden work

#### ✗ DON'T

- ✗ Wash your car at home. Most restriction stages prohibit this
- ✗ Water during the heat of the day (10 a.m.–6 p.m.) as most water is lost to evaporation
- ✗ Let the tap run while rinsing dishes, defrosting food, or waiting for cold water
- ✗ Run the dishwasher or washer with a partial load
- ✗ Assume a brown lawn needs more water. Dormancy is normal and it will recover
- ✗ Fill or top up pools without checking your local restriction stage first

Xeriscape landscaping, using plants adapted to our semi-arid climate, is worth exploring for anyone thinking about future garden changes. According to the City of Kelowna, xeriscape landscapes can use **30 to 100% less water** than traditionally styled gardens, while requiring less maintenance and no chemical fertilizers. The Okanagan Xeriscape Association maintains an extensive plant database suited to our climate at [okanaganxeriscape.org](http://okanaganxeriscape.org).

*"Okanagan Lake supports our community each and every single day. Let's all do our part in reducing our water use so this precious resource can continue to support and inspire us for generations to come."*

**City of Kelowna Water Smart Program**

We are all in this together. The actions we take in the coming weeks, at our desks, in our campus kitchens and at home, will directly influence whether our communities face more severe, mandatory restrictions this summer. Conservation now keeps more options open for everyone.

**Stay informed.** Check your local municipality's website for the current restriction stage in your area, as stages can change quickly this time of year. A broader OC Sustainability Newsletter covering our full environmental commitments is planned for July. This update is focused on the urgent water situation affecting all OC campus communities right now.

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#### EXPLORE MORE AT OC SUSTAINABILITY

Water conservation is just one part of Okanagan College's broader commitment to sustainability. The OC sustainability website brings together resources, news, and initiatives across all campuses, from energy and waste reduction to biodiversity and climate resilience. If this week's update sparked your curiosity, there is a lot more to explore.

**Read, explore, and stay informed at:**

**[www.okanagancollege.ca/sustainability](http://www.okanagancollege.ca/sustainability)**

## SOURCES & FURTHER READING

1. **Okanagan Basin Water Board: Drought Resources**  
Regional drought bulletins, planning tools, and real-time monitoring dashboards.  
<https://obwb.ca/drought/>
2. **Regional District of North Okanagan: Water Restrictions**  
Current restriction stages for Greater Vernon Water and all RDNO utility areas, including Stage 3 alert (June 4, 2026).  
<https://www.rdno.ca/restrictions>
3. **City of Kelowna: Water Smart Program**  
Per capita water use data, indoor conservation tips, irrigation assessments, and rebate programs.  
<https://www.kelowna.ca/city-services/water-wastewater/city-water-utility/water-smart>
4. **City of Kelowna: Landscaping Tips**  
Xeriscape principles, soil preparation, plant selection, and water-efficient landscape design for our climate.  
<https://www.kelowna.ca/city-services/water-wastewater/city-water-utility/water-smart/landscaping-tips>
5. **City of Penticton: Stage 2 Water Restrictions (April 27, 2026)**  
Official announcement and details on Stage 2 restrictions, including watering schedules and drought conditions data.  
<https://www.penticton.ca/city-hall/news-alerts/stage-2-water-restrictions-begin-may-1-due-early-drought-conditions>
6. **Castanet: Black Mountain Irrigation District, New Water Restrictions for Kelowna (June 25, 2026)**  
Stage 1 imposed for Mission Creek service area; Stage 2 ongoing for Scotty Creek. Reservoirs released three weeks ahead of schedule due to drought.  
<https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/621683/Black-Mountain-Irrigation-District-imposes-new-water-restrictions-for-Kelowna-users>
7. **City of Salmon Arm: Water Restrictions**  
Current Stage 2 restrictions, watering schedules, fine schedule, and exemption details for Salmon Arm residents and businesses.  
<https://www.salmonarm.ca/462/Water-Restrictions>