

# FIGHTING RESTRICTIONS

**I**t being March, many of you are gearing up for this month's start of what we hope will be a successful spring season. Those of you in warmer climates will see some very busy weekends, while more Northern locations will be busy stacking shelves and planning promotions.

Yes, March is definitely a busy retail month, but will it pay off this year? Predictions are mixed (see the Industry Leader Forecast in January *Lawn & Garden Retailer*). Some predict a slightly up year, others a bank-buster. I guess all we can really do is wait and pray for a few warm, sunny weekends.

That is, unless you live in Aurora, Colo. You see, retailers in Aurora already know what their spring and summer will be like. Their fate was sealed when city officials banned the planting of annuals, vegetables and lawns this year. Residents are being allowed to plant trees, shrubs and perennials until May 3rd when this year's water restrictions will be announced. (See page 56 for the full story). While these are the worst restrictions I've heard of, they aren't the only ones, and as summer progresses, retailers across the country can expect negative press, restrictive water policies and slow sales.

## SELF-EXAMINATION

Over the past few months, I've been in nurseries from Florida to Illinois, and I've seen enough wasted water to justify such close governmental scrutiny. Dripping hoses, thoroughly watered walkways and lots and lots of irrigation-water puddles. With so much good, fresh water being so often wasted, I'm convinced that many operations are contributing to water shortages.

Sound like your store? Don't worry, I won't tell, but the time is quickly approaching when annual restrictions will be the least of your problems. The Federal Clean Water Act will necessitate that everyone move to closed irrigation systems and water-conscious municipalities will start asking the hard questions of those they perceive as heavy water users. "How much fresh water do you use each day for irrigation?" "What water-saving measures do you have in place?" I know operations that have already been asked these questions, and they didn't have the answers. In front of state-level legislators who were ready to support their position, they didn't have answers. When they left, they also didn't have the special waiver they were seeking that would have exempted them from water restrictions.

## A GOOD EXAMPLE

Take heart. My warnings aren't meant to discourage but to motivate. And to prove it, I'll give you an example of what a well-informed, proactive industry can accomplish.

In case you don't know, the drought in Virginia last summer was the worst on record. Before it was over, cities across the state were banning lawn and landscape watering, fleet washing and any other high-water-usage activities. Some green goods companies were even told not to maintain their stock, but the self-serve car wash industry operated relatively untouched. The difference? Long before restrictions were put into place, car wash owners and industry representatives had educated state and local government officials about both their water-wise practices and their economic impact. So while our industry suffered, self-serve car washes were praised as community leaders.

The fruits of this industry's initiative should inspire us to start working against water restrictions for our industry — if it's not already too late. Sometimes, a few water meters and a bit of luck seem like an investment we can afford.



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### coming next month...

- Management:**  
How to keep your best employees
- Green Goods:**  
Which poinsettias will your customers be looking for this year?
- Consumer Trends:**  
The best trends from overseas
- Plus...**
  - National Flower Week
  - Creating floating water gardens
  - Merchandising a garden accents department

*Bridget E. White*

# LAWN & GARDEN Retailer

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