



Proposed Minnesota Plumbing Code Changes – Stormwater Reuse for Irrigation

The Minnesota Plumbing Board has proposed language that appears to ban stormwater for irrigation and other non-potable uses through the plumbing code. This would kill a proven, cost-effective practice that protects our lakes, conserves drinking water, improves water quality, reduces flooding, improves climate resiliency, and supports local jobs — all while conflicting with state law and putting millions in taxpayer investments at risk. Action is required so the code is not adopted as currently written.

What is proposed?

- The Plumbing Board (under Department of Labor and Industry (DLI)) is rewriting Chapter 15 of the Minnesota Plumbing Code and has proposed language that explicitly says, “Alternate water sources shall not be stormwater.”
- This would ban stormwater (from parking lots, streets, etc.) for outdoor irrigation and non-potable uses.
- Revisions to other chapters look to expand plumbing code jurisdiction to entire sites (not just buildings) and would require licensed plumbers and code-certified materials for many irrigation systems, which will increase costs for projects and add little documented benefit.
- The Plumbing Board voted on the proposed changes on March 17, 2026; rulemaking is moving forward unless stopped.

Why is this concerning to watershed districts, watershed management organizations, and cities?

- Puts millions of dollars in existing systems at risk (Clean Water Fund grants from BWSR, MPCA, and Metropolitan Council, local public and private capital investments). Some projects could become illegal or require expensive retrofits.
- Eliminates an important and proven tool for managing stormwater runoff that also provides multiple other benefits including water conservation, energy savings, and climate resiliency.
- Undermines MS4 permit compliance and volume/phosphorus reduction goals that we’ve spent years achieving.
- Forces more groundwater pumping — worsening aquifer stress (White Bear Lake, etc.) and increasing long-term water supply costs.

What is the impact on taxpayers and the environment?

- Wastes public investments and could require repayment of grants on projects that suddenly become non-compliant.
- Increases flooding risk, reduces water quality improvements, and works against climate resilience goals.
- No documented cases of illness from stormwater irrigation in Minnesota—the code change is not based on real-world risk data.

Potential Policy and Legal Concerns

- Conflicts with MPCA's Stormwater Manual and design criteria and Metropolitan Council's 2050 Water Plan that actively encourage reuse.
- Conflicts with the purpose and goals of the MN Interagency Work Group for Stormwater Capture and Use (SCU) to advance the development of guidance for the implementation of safe and sustainable SCU practices in Minnesota.
- Conflicts with 2017 state law that created exemptions from DNR water appropriation permits for stormwater reuse systems.
- The Plumbing Board has statutory authority over building plumbing systems — not site-wide outdoor stormwater management, which is the clear domain of MPCA, BWSR, watershed districts, and local MS4 programs.
- This is an overreach that bypasses the environmental and water-quality agencies that have led this issue for years.

What can be done?

- **Legislature.** Support and strengthen SF 2442 (or attach similar language to other bills) to explicitly protect outdoor stormwater reuse for irrigation. Add a pause/rider on Plumbing Board rulemaking until interagency agreement is reached.
- **Plumbing Board / DLI.** Pause the rulemaking for 2024 Uniform Plumbing Code (including Chapter 15) and require full coordination with MPCA, MDH, BWSR, watershed districts/watershed management organizations, municipalities, and other stakeholders before any final action to move forward.
- **Local Action.** Adopt a city/county/watershed resolution opposing the changes and supporting continued safe stormwater reuse (template available).
- **Local Action.** Contact your legislators (especially on Environment and Natural Resources and Health and Human Services committees) as soon as possible. Share real examples of successful reuse projects in your district.

*Talking points created with assistance from AI