



Polk County Florida Water StarSM Ordinance Takes Effect

Polk County is the first county within the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) Planning Area and the second county in the state to require builders meet Florida Water Star (FWS) criteria to obtain their Certificate of Occupancy. The ordinance took effect Dec. 1, 2024.

The FWS program helps local governments meet increased water supply needs due to significant increases in commercial and residential development. The FWS program was created by the St. Johns River Water Management District in 2006 as an affordable, achievable certification for builders to construct residential homes and commercial buildings that surpass state building code standards for water efficiency. Specific criteria are required including indoor fixtures and appliances, landscape design, and irrigation system design and components.

Studies by the University of Florida, the Toho Water Authority and On Top of the World Communities have shown water savings of approximately **48,000 gallons** per home annually, saving homeowners roughly **\$530** each year on energy and water utility bills.

Polk County and some municipalities within the county require builders meet FWS standards to obtain the Certificate of Occupancy (CO). Builders have the following two options to meet the code requirements, except in the City of Lake Wales where affidavits are not an option and a FWS certificate is required:

- **FWS Certification:** A third-party inspection is conducted by a trained FWS inspector and official FWS certification is obtained.
- **FWS Affidavit:** The builder submits an affidavit or otherwise confirms through the local government's permitting system that the FWS criteria have been met. A third-party inspection does not take place, but random audits are conducted by the Southwest Florida Water Management District if requested by the government or other party.

Local governments within the CFWI Planning Area that have written FWS by ordinance into code include Auburndale, Bartow, Davenport, Dundee, Eagle Lake, Frostproof, Haines City, Lake Alfred, Lake Hamilton, Lake Wales, Mulberry, Polk City, Polk County and Winter Haven. More than **28,000** homes are anticipated to be built within Polk County cities that have written FWS into code. Each of these homes will use up to

48,000 gallons of water less per year than traditional construction, equated to an estimated savings of **1.3 billion gallons** of water annually.

Builders have the option of hiring a FWS Accredited Professional (AP) to assist them in meeting FWS standards. In partnership with the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association, the FWS AP program has trained more than **1,000** professionals from the landscape and irrigation industry to design and install water-efficient landscapes and irrigation systems. The next FWS AP trainings will be offered Jan. 22 in Apopka and Jan. 23 in Winter Haven.

To learn more about FWS or for more information about the FWS AP trainings, visit FloridaWaterStar.com or contact Robin Grantham at (352) 400-8635 or Deidre Irwin at (386) 546-8437.