

September 2026

Retailer-Wholesaler Group Water Efficiency Sub-Group

‘State of the Nation’ overview of
water resources and efficiency
within the Golf Sector



Water in the Golf Sector FAQs

The following statements are intended to provide some clarification to key questions and concerns frequently raised by golf course managers and the wider golf sector. These brief FAQs are intended to ‘mythbust’ key water resource and water sector topics.

These FAQs have been developed by wholesale and retail water companies, the Environment Agency and golf representative bodies, including England Golf, GCMA and BIGGA.

a) Is there a National Water Target? • Yes. There are legally binding national water targets in England under The Environmental Targets (Water) (England) Regulations 2023, under the Environment Act 2021. The overarching target is a 20% reduction in water put into public supply by 2038. This is comprised of separate reduction targets on leakage, household and business water use. • The business water target requires a gradual reduction in total business consumption of potable water of 9% by 31 March 2038, and 15% by 2050.	d) Will water companies shut off your water supply? • No. Water companies are committed to ensuring that water supplies are resilient for homes and businesses. However, with increasing pressure on water availability due to a changing climate, abstraction challenges and a growing population, water companies need businesses to be more water use efficient, secure alternative water sources and increase on-site water storage to improve business resilience during peak summer and drought periods. • The golf sector is an essential partner in this process, due to the legacy reliance on potable water for irrigation and high demand during peak times of the year. Long-term sustainable water management should move away from relying on potable water for any irrigation needs.	a) Is the Environment Agency engaging with golf clubs about potential water abstraction reductions? • Yes. The Environment Agency (EA) is engaging with all private water abstractors, including golf clubs, to raise awareness of current and future increasing pressures on water resources and the potential implications for future water availability. This includes discussing how climate change, environmental needs and growing water demand may affect abstraction licences in some catchments, potentially leading to changes in licensed abstraction volumes where water resources are limited. The EA is also exploring wider abstraction reforms that could support more flexible and sustainable water management practices, helping to ensure water is available for both the environment and those who need it, including golf clubs.	c) Can a golf course apply for ground or surface water abstraction? • Yes. Golf courses can apply to the Environment Agency for water abstraction licences to abstract water from surface water sources (such as rivers and lakes) or groundwater sources (such as boreholes or wells). • In England, Licenced approval an abstraction licence is required when abstraction volumes exceed 20m³ 20 cubic metres per day (20,000 litres/day). Applications are assessed against local water availability and environmental considerations, and approval is not guaranteed or may be subject to restrictions in catchments where water resources are constrained.
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e) Does a Temporary Use Ban (TUB – ‘hosepipe ban’) affect golf courses? • Yes. The Temporary Usage Ban (TUB) does affect sporting grounds, golf courses and recreational facilities. Golf courses must abide by any restrictions that are put into place through a TUB. Restrictions only apply to mains potable water usage and can vary by wholesaler. All golf clubs should also minimise their water use and are generally permitted to use mains water only on the following areas. – Yes - golf greens and teeing areas – No - fairways – No - approaches – No - rough areas – No - ornamental grass around clubhouse – No - landscaping and decorative planting	f) Does a Non-Essential Use Ban (NEUB) affect golf courses? • Yes. All water use restrictions imposed by a Temporary Use Ban (TUB) are carried over with the Non-Essential Use Ban (NEUB). The NEUB introduces additional restrictions for golf courses, including; stopping all mains water use for non-essential commercial maintenance such as cleaning club windows, washing golf carts or club vehicles, and maintaining ornamental ponds or water features. Golf courses that utilise their own alternative water infrastructure—such as private boreholes, natural lakes, or rainwater harvesting reservoirs—are legally exempt from the TUB and NEUB, except when separate restrictions are imposed by the Environment Agency.	g) Are there any tools of information sources to help golf clubs on water management? • Yes. There are several key websites and documents that support golf clubs on water resilience and water efficiency. (insert links to Eng Golf Toolkit, R&A resources, Water Charter, EA reservoir guidance). • England Golf – Golf Club Water Security Toolkit https://static.whsplatform.englandgolf.org/clubs/1000-1/uploads/pdf/water%20security%20toolkit.pdf • R&A – Golf Course 2030 Water https://www.randa.org/sustainable-golf/water/solutions • R&A - Golf courses urged to utilise GC2030 Water Portal amid UK drought https://www.randa.org/articles/golf-courses-urged-to-utilise-gc2030-water-portal-amid-uk-drought
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What's happening now? RWG Golf Sector Project

The **Retail Wholesaler Group - Water Efficiency Sub-Group** (RWGWESG – all wholesale and retail water companies), in partnership with the Environment Agency, England Golf, GCMA and BIGGA, is commencing a nation-wide study on ***Golf Sector Resilience and Alternative Water Supply Options***.

This is not just another survey. This will be THE water CENSUS

Results from this project will help the golf sector improve water resilience going forward

This project is a water sector and Environment Agency lead project, with support from the golf sector's leading presentative organisations

We need every golf course to help!! Results from this project are aimed to help every golf club!!



What’s happening now? RWG Golf Sector Project

What is happening?	• The Retailer Wholesaler Group - Water Efficiency Sub-Group (RWGWESG – all wholesale and retail water companies), in partnership with the Environment Agency, England Golf, GCMA and BIGGA, is undertaking a nation-wide study on <i>Golf Sector Resilience and Alternative Water Supply Options</i>. This study aims to address the following; – quantify the volumes of mains potable water currently used for irrigation, including peak seasonal demand; – quantify current on-site water storage volumes across the sector, quantify storage volumes needed to achieve annual resilience – quantify the potential demand reduction benefit against the Defra national water target using a range of water abstraction and on-site water storage – outline the policy and regulatory changes needed to enable easier and faster alternative water abstraction and on-site storage – future studies will aim to identify, quantify and map all alternative water supply options for each golf course in the UK, covering groundwater and surface water abstraction, surface floodwater, on- and off-site rainwater capture, and final effluent reuse
Why is this happening?	• Need a more accurate and total understanding of water use, water abstraction, water storage • Need an accurate view of the golf sector’s reliance on mains potable water for irrigation • Need a complete and accurate view of existing and required on-site water storage volumes • Need to quantify what is the ‘size of the prize’ for helping golf sector identify alternative water sources • Need to identify the barriers and changes needed for abstraction licensing, on-site storage, surface water capture, effluent reuse • No comprehensive mapping of alternative water supply options exists for every golf course across the country. Call to ACTION: Please submit your data to the Project Survey
Proposed Long-Term Objectives for the Golf Sector	1. Use Non-Potable Water: each golf club should work to secure alternative non-potable sources of water as their primary source of irrigation water. Non-potable water would replace all remaining mains potable water used for irrigation. These non-potable sources could include; surface or groundwater abstraction, runoff capture, rainwater, greywater, final effluent. 2. Develop On-Site Storage: each golf club should aim to develop enough on-site water storage capability to provide enough water to supply at least 1 year’s worth of irrigation supply

RWG Golf Sector Project

- The **RWGWESG** has commissioned **Sporting Insights** to undertake a nation-wide data / evidence sourcing effort
- This survey / data capture effort will seek to secure responses from c.1,800 golf courses in England and Wales
- The survey / data capture effort will build evidence on water use, water sources & licencing, current & needed water storage, irrigation (below)
- **CALL to ACTION for ALL GOLF CLUBS: Please complete the survey sent by Sporting Insights! Please answer as much as you can**
- **Your data and answers will help us drive improvements to alternative water sourcing, water storage approvals**

Water Use

- Avg annual water use (litres)
- Avg Annual water use for irrigation (litres)
- Peak / highest water use for irrigation (litres/day)
- How much water would you course irrigation need to supply 1 year
- How many holes on your golf course? How many members?
- What other facilities do you have? (club house, hotel, conference centre, spa, sporting etc)

Water Source

- What is the primary / secondary water used for irrigation (mains potable, groundwater, river abstraction, RWH, final effluent, other)
- Do you currently have a groundwater abstraction licence?
- What is your groundwater abstraction licence volume? (litres/yr)
- Do you currently have a surface water abstraction licence?
- What is your surface water abstraction licence volume? (litres/yr)

Water Licence

- Have you applied for future water abstraction from the EA
- Has the EA ever rejected your application for water abstraction
- Has the EA ever rejected your application for reservoir development
- Has the EA informed you of potential abstraction licence reduction / removal

Water Storage

- Do you have on-site water storage to supply irrigation (yes/no)
- What sort of on-site water storage (dropdown: open reservoirs, tanks)
- What is the capacity of your on-site storage (litres)
- Does onsite storage hold enough water to supply your irrigation for 1 yr (yes/no)
- Has the EA ever rejected an application for reservoir development?

Irrigation

- How old is your course irrigation system?
- Which areas do you normally irrigate?