



AS IT IS

## Las Vegas Plans to Ban Useless Grass

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Las Vegas city officials have found that a lot of grass is useless.

The plant is never laid on, played on or even stepped on. The grass is only there to look nice.

The city in the American state of Nevada is built in a desert. And officials have found that there are 21 square kilometers of useless grass.

Now, Las Vegas is trying to become the first place in the country to ban that kind of grass often seen between streets, in housing developments and in office parks.

It is estimated that useless grass makes up 40 percent of all the **turf** in Las Vegas and it needs a lot of water to survive. Grass needs four times more water than dry climate plants like cactus or succulents. By tearing out the grass, the city could reduce yearly water usage by 15 percent.

Las Vegas may be known to the outside world for its partying, **casinos** and **excess**. But officials say community residents have strongly supported saving water.

The city is asking the Nevada state legislature to ban useless grass. California temporarily banned grass watering during an extremely dry period several years ago. But no state or large city has tried to permanently ban watering some kinds of grass.

Justin Jones is a commissioner in Clark County. He said the ban will not change people's lives very much.

“To be clear, we are not coming after your average homeowner's **backyard**,” he said. But grass in the middle of a highway is, in his words, “dumb.”

“The only people that ever set foot on grass that’s in the middle of a roadway system are people cutting the grass,” Jones said.

Jones said some communities oppose the ban. But after years of campaigns for better water use, there has been a cultural change.

In 2003, the Southern Nevada Water Authority banned developers from planting grass in front of new homes. It also offered homeowners \$30 for each square meter of grass they tear out. But fewer people are now using the program.

Water usage has increased in southern Nevada by 9 percent since 2019. And last year, Las Vegas went a record 240 days without major rainfall.

The Colorado River provides much of Nevada’s drinking water. The river also supplies Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Wyoming and Mexico.

The river could lose more water as climate change affects it. Arizona, California and Nevada are expected to have their amount of river water cut in the future.

Water officials in other dry cities said water usage needs to be reduced. But they fear the reaction to reforms like the ones in Las Vegas if their communities do not accept them.

Cynthia Campbell is the water resources adviser for the city of Phoenix in Arizona. She said trees and grass combat “urban heat islands:” areas in cities that can get dangerously hot.

She said there might come a point when city restrictions get too severe for some residents.

“They’ll say, ‘This is the point of no return for me,’” Campbell said. “For some people, it’s a pool. For some people, it’s grass.”

Colby Pellegrino is the director of the Southern Nevada Water Authority. He does not know if the plan to ban grass will spread to other cities.

But, he said, “every community that relies on Colorado River water,” will have to make changes.

I’m Jonathan Evans.

*Sam Metz and Ken Ritter reported this story for the Associated Press. Dan Novak adapted it for VOA Learning English. Mario Ritter, Jr. was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**turf**- *n.* - the upper layer of ground that is made up of grass and plant roots

**casino** -*n.* a building or room that has games of chance that people play for money

**excess**- *adj.* an amount that is more than the usual or necessary amount

**backyard**- *n.* an area of grass behind someone's house

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