

DROP BY DROP: USE WATER WISELY DURING A DROUGHT

Water is an important natural resource. It is used every day at home and at work in so many ways that it is often taken for granted. This fact sheet is about water conservation and what can be done to reduce water use during a drought.

Drought Phases

Over a long period of time, lack of rain will result in drought conditions that affect public and private water systems. To describe the severity of drought conditions, Pennsylvania has developed three drought phases: Drought Watch, Drought Warning, and Drought Emergency. These three drought phases affect individual water use during a drought.

Under a Drought Watch, individuals are asked to voluntarily conserve water. The objective of voluntary water conservation is to reduce individual water use by 5 percent, or down to 60 gallons per day, based on a statewide average of 62 gallons per person per day.

Under a Drought Warning, individuals are asked to continue their voluntary conservation of water. The objective of voluntary water conservation under a Drought Warning is to reduce individual water use by 10 percent, or down to 56 gallons per person per day.

Under a Drought Emergency, individuals may be required to observe mandatory water use restrictions. The objective of mandatory water use restrictions is to reduce individual water use by 15 percent, or down to a maximum of 55 gallons per person per day.

If drought conditions continue to deteriorate during a Drought Emergency, municipalities may implement local water rationing. Water rationing requires specific limits on individual water use as set by the local water supplier. For water rationing to work effectively, all individual homes must have a water meter to record the amount of water used by each household. By reading water meters and knowing the number of residents in each home, the water supplier can determine if the household is violating the water rationing regulation.

Mandatory Water Use Restrictions

The following water uses are considered nonessential and are prohibited during a drought emergency and water rationing:

- Watering lawns, gardens, landscaped areas, trees, shrubs, and outdoor plants.
- Watering golf courses.
- Washing paved surfaces such as streets, sidewalks, driveways, garages, parking areas, tennis courts, and patios.
- Operating water fountains, artificial waterfalls, and reflecting pools.
- Washing vehicles.
- Serving water in eating places, unless specifically requested by the individual.
- Filling and topping off swimming pools.

As with every regulation, there are exceptions to the nonessential water use restrictions. These exceptions are noted in detail on DEP's website at www.dep.pa.gov/Drought.

Drought Conservation Measures

To conserve water during a drought emergency, there are many things you can do:

- Keep an empty container near sinks. Put it under the faucet while waiting for water to warm up. Pour any leftover water from cooking or drinking into it. Use the water for plants.
- Place a bucket in the shower to catch water that is wasted while waiting for the shower water to warm up.
- Take dirty water from birdbaths, flower vases, or pet dishes and reuse on potted plants.
- Instead of using hot water to defrost foods, defrost foods in the refrigerator over night or use a microwave.
- Keep your garden weed-free, since weeds use available water in the soil.
- When it rains, leave buckets outside to collect water for washing cars and watering plants and gardens.
- Turn off ice-makers for refrigerators and use trays instead.
- Position downspouts, with extensions if needed, so rain water runs onto the lawn or into the garden.
- If you have a dehumidifier, use the water it collects to water plants and gardens.

How To Conserve Water In The Community

To conserve water, there are many things the communities are encouraged to do:

- Encourage the use of water conservation devices by large water-using facilities (such as schools, health clubs or motels).
- Survey water users within large water-using facilities and develop plans to reduce water use.
- Encourage a community-based service organization such as a scout group, service club, or church youth group to start a water conservation program.
- Encourage use of drought-tolerant vegetation in outdoor landscaping at large facilities and community sites.
- Retrofit older buildings and facilities with water-efficient plumbing fixtures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Office of Water Resources Planning

Planning and Conservation Division

P.O. Box 8555

Harrisburg, PA 17105-8555

717-772-4048

Email: droughtinfo@pa.gov

For more information, visit www.dep.pa.gov/Drought.