

NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GOV. RIDGE DECLARES DROUGHT EMERGENCY IN 55 PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

Urges continued conservation in remaining 12 counties

Governor warns that if conditions do not improve, PA may face the worst drought on record in state history

HARRISBURG (July 20) – Gov. Tom Ridge today signed a proclamation declaring a drought emergency in 55 Pennsylvania counties and calling on Pennsylvanians to conserve water as drought conditions statewide continue to deteriorate.

Gov. Ridge said that, should conditions not improve soon, this drought has the potential to be worse than the drought of 1964 – the worst drought on record in state history.

"Pennsylvania's water supply is at dangerously low levels," said Gov. Ridge, just before signing the drought emergency declaration. "I urge all Pennsylvanians to do their part to conserve water in every way they can. Reduce the amount of water you use both inside and outside the home. If we don't act now to conserve our water, there won't be any water left to conserve. And we'll face the worst drought in our state's history. That's why today I will declare a drought emergency in 55 Pennsylvania counties."

Gov. Ridge signed the drought emergency declaration in Riverfront Park in Harrisburg, overlooking the very low Susquehanna River.

Four counties – Armstrong, Butler, Clarion and Jefferson – remain in a drought warning. Eight counties – Crawford, Erie, Elk, Forest, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren – are under a drought watch. With Gov. Ridge's action today, the remaining 55 counties now are under a drought emergency.

A drought watch, the first stage of the three drought declarations, calls for a voluntary 5 percent reduction of non-essential water use. A drought warning, the second of the three-stage drought response, calls for a 10 percent voluntary reduction in water consumption. A drought emergency, the third and most severe stage, imposes mandatory restrictions on water use. Gov. Ridge must declare a drought emergency.

Gov. Ridge cited the following reasons behind the deteriorating drought conditions statewide: little snow this winter; little rain this spring; and a dry, hot summer. The results of these factors are: record-low stream levels; very low groundwater levels; and wells running dry.

"The water levels we're seeing today – in the middle of summer – are on par with levels we would see in September or October," Gov. Ridge said. "Groundwater levels typically won't begin to recharge until the leaves are off the trees and we get sustained rains in the fall. That means we still have two months of hot, summer weather to endure – before the fall rains begin to replenish our reserves."

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council, chaired by Lt. Gov. Mark Schweiker, is required by law to meet within the next 72 hours to receive the Governor's declaration and to review any necessary actions to assist affected communities under drought emergency.

The Governor's proclamation allows state and local agencies to expedite their response to the affected communities to ensure continued protection of public health and safety. It allows agencies to hire, purchase and contract without the usual bid requirements. The declaration also allows communities to implement mandatory water-conservation measures; implement local drought emergency plans; and enforce water-conservation measures.

The Governor's proclamation also allows water suppliers, with the approval of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), to implement local water-rationing plans in the event that conditions get even worse. The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council must approve these water-rationing plans.

In a drought emergency, mandatory water-use restrictions may include: no serving of water in eating places unless requested by the customer; closing down of indoor and outdoor water fountains, artificial waterfalls and pools; and residential and business rationing.

"The mandatory restrictions put in place by the drought emergency target non-essential water uses first: watering lawns; topping off or filling swimming pools; washing cars except with a bucket," Gov. Ridge said. "If we all do our part by using common sense and conserving water, we can make sure we protect our water resources for the fall and winter ahead."

"If these measures don't reduce consumption, rationing could go into effect. Rationing is the last resort."

Members of the state's Drought Task Force recommended last week that the Governor issue a drought emergency proclamation by the end of the month in the Delaware, Susquehanna and portions of the Ohio river basins, due to record-low groundwater and streamflow levels.

DEP Secretary James M. Seif said that one-third of the state's groundwater monitoring wells showed record-low seasonal levels in June. Twenty-one of the state's 50 monitoring wells currently are at emergency levels. More than 40 stream gauges in the Delaware, Susquehanna and Ohio river basins measured record-low daily flows during May and June. Precipitation deficits are continuing to grow in most counties with long-range forecasts predicting well-below normal rainfall in most parts of the state.

Agriculture Secretary Samuel E. Hayes Jr. said that, while it's too early to put a dollar amount on agricultural losses due to drought, the Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service reports farmers in some counties are reporting as much as a 20 percent reduction in milk production in some areas because of heat- and drought-related conditions.

The current drought period began this winter when Gov. Ridge declared a drought emergency in 14 counties in the central part of the state. That emergency declaration was lifted in March and, since that time, the entire state has remained in either a drought watch or warning status.

More information, including new videos on how to care for lawns and gardens during a drought and saving water inside the home, is available from the state's Drought Information Center on the state's website at www.state.pa.us or directly at www.dep.state.pa.us.

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Editor's Note: Attached is a list of counties under a drought emergency, drought warning and drought watch.

PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES UNDER A DROUGHT EMERGENCY (55)

Adams	Allegheny	Beaver	Bedford	Berks
Blair	Bradford	Bucks	Cambria	Cameron
Carbon	Centre	Chester	Clearfield	Clinton
Columbia	Cumberland	Dauphin	Delaware	Fayette
Franklin	Fulton	Greene	Huntingdon	Indiana
Juniata	Lackawanna	Lancaster	Lawrence	Lebanon
Lehigh	Luzerne	Lycoming	Mifflin	Monroe
Montgomery	Montour	Northampton	Northumberland	Perry
Philadelphia	Pike	Potter	Schuylkill	Snyder
Somerset	Sullivan	Susquehanna	Tioga	Union
Washington	Wayne	Westmoreland	Wyoming	York

PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES UNDER A DROUGHT WARNING (4)

Armstrong	Butler	Clarion	Jefferson
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PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES UNDER A DROUGHT WATCH (8)

Crawford	Erie	Elk	Forest
McKean	Mercer	Venango	Warren

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