

**NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DEP LAUNCHES TOLL-FREE NUMBER, INTERACTIVE MESSAGE BOARD  
FOR DROUGHT QUESTIONS**

**HARRISBURG (Aug. 5)** – On behalf of Gov. Tom Ridge, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary James M. Seif today announced two new services -- a toll-free Drought Emergency Hotline, 888-457-6653, and an interactive Drought Message Board available on DEP's website -- to help answer citizen questions about the drought emergency.

"Pennsylvanians want to follow the rules under the drought emergency, but are sometimes confused about what exactly they can and cannot do," Seif said. "These two new services will help them get the answers they are looking for, as well as share ideas on how to conserve water."

Callers to the Drought Emergency Hotline can get recorded information by choosing from a menu of topics such as the watering of lawns, golf courses and gardens; the washing of paved areas, vehicles or buildings, or the operation of pools, fountains and other ornamental water systems. They can also request an application for a variance, or speak to a DEP staff member for assistance.

The hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week; however, operator assistance is available only during regular business hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Visitors to the Drought Emergency Message Board can post a question that will be answered by DEP staff, or share a tip on reusing or saving water.

"Many people have similar questions regarding the drought emergency restrictions," Seif said. "Since both the question and response are posted, anyone with a similar question will benefit from seeing the answer."

In addition, DEP encourages visitors to share their water saving ideas.

"With many water companies reporting reductions in water use between 10 and 20 percent since the drought emergency was declared, we know people have some good ideas on how to save water," Seif said. "We want people to share these ingenious ideas with us, and their 12 million neighbors."

Gov. Tom Ridge declared a drought emergency in 55 counties on July 20. It imposes mandatory restrictions on non-essential water uses such as:

- not watering established lawns;
- watering gardens, shrubs and flowers only between the hours of 5 p.m. and 9 a.m., and only by means of a hand held container or hose with an automatic shut-off valve;
- no washing cars except by bucket or at commercial car washes;
- no hosing of paved surfaces such as sidewalks, driveways and patios; and

- golf courses may water only tees and greens between 5 p.m. and 9 a.m.

Armstrong, Butler, Clarion and Jefferson counties remain in a drought warning. Crawford, Erie, Elk, Forest, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren counties are under a drought watch.

A drought watch, the first stage of the three drought declarations, calls for a voluntary 5 percent reduction of nonessential water use. A drought warning, the second stage, calls for a 10 percent voluntary reduction, and a drought emergency, the third and most severe stage, imposes mandatory restrictions on water use. Only Gov. Ridge can declare a drought emergency.

More information, including videos on how to care for your lawn and garden and save water inside the home, visit the DEP through the Pennsylvania website at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us), or directly at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us) (choose Drought Emergency).

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