

**Rachel Carson State Office Building  
P.O. Box 8555  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8555  
July 26, 1999**

**Bureau of Watershed Conservation**

717-772-4048

Dear Public Water Supplier:

On Tuesday, July 22, Governor Ridge declared a drought "emergency" in 55 counties. Armstrong, Butler, Clarion and Jefferson Counties remain in a "warning," while Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren remain in a "watch." As a public water supplier, you should be taking actions commensurate with the status of the county in which your service area and/or sources are located.

Drought Emergency

Drought "emergency" indicates that water shortages exist. Governor Ridge declared a drought emergency at this time on the basis of deteriorating hydrologic conditions, which are monitored under the State's drought contingency plan. Throughout the affected area, precipitation, streamflow, groundwater levels and soil moisture levels are substantially below normal. Accumulated precipitation deficiencies, since January 1, range as high as 9 inches in the affected counties. Continuing precipitation deficits, combined with dropping ground water levels, drove many stream flows and many of our county monitoring wells to record seasonal lows during June and early July. Over 15 stream gages in the Delaware River basin, over 25 gages in the Susquehanna basin and several gages in the Ohio basin measured daily flows that were the lowest on record for the day. At many of those gages, this occurred for several consecutive days, or in some cases for weeks. At one point, all the gages on the Susquehanna main stem were measuring record lows. At the same time, the mouth of the Lehigh, Schuylkill, West Branch Susquehanna, Kiskiminetas, Monongahela, and Beaver Rivers, along with many gages on smaller streams across the state, were also measuring record low seasonal flows.

End-of-June ground water data was even less encouraging. Monitoring wells in 3 Ohio basin, 6 Susquehanna basin and 8 Delaware basin counties measured record low monthly average water levels for the month of June. Since we have monitoring wells in only 50 counties, this means one-third set records. Including those, 21 recorded emergency levels, while 4 were at warning and 4 others were at watch levels.

Public health and safety may be at risk. The Governor's emergency proclamation assigns certain responsibilities to water purveyors, and it also provides administrative measures to assist you in drought response.

All citizens in the emergency area are subject to a mandatory ban on nonessential water use, as outlined in the proclamation and described in 4 Pa. Code Chapter 119. Copies of both are enclosed. These bans are enforceable by state and local police, under emergency authority. You can assist them by acting as their agents when you observe violations of the ban. The authority for enforcement of these regulations is contained in the Emergency Management Services Code (35 Pa. C.S. §7101 et. seq., Act 323 of November 26, 1978, P.L. 1332) and the Governor's proclamation. The penalties for violation of these regulations are contained in 35 Pa. C.S. §7707, a copy of which is enclosed for your reference.

The county commissioners in each of the emergency-designated counties will be establishing a drought management task force within their counties. These task forces will coordinate, monitor and manage all drought reporting and response activities and water conservation measures undertaken within their counties, as necessary to ensure the provision of safe and reliable drinking water supplies. Public water supply agencies within those counties should keep the county drought management task force apprised of conditions and developing problems. The task force is your direct link to the county and state emergency management resources.

The Governor's proclamation requires all public water supply agencies within the designated emergency area to develop a drought contingency plan within 30 days. The Department is requiring that all systems serving more than 100 service connections submit contingency plans to the Department by August 22, if you do not have a plan that has already been approved by the Department. If your plan has already been approved, you should update it as necessary to reflect changes in your sources or significant changes in your system demands. Updated plans should also be submitted to the Department by August 22. If no updates are necessary, you need not submit your plan. Plans should be addressed to the Commonwealth Drought Coordinator at the Bureau's address listed on this letterhead.

### Rationing Plans

You are urged to monitor your supplies closely and to follow your contingency plans rigorously. Should it become necessary for you to ration water to your customers, the Governor's proclamation provides the authority for such actions. The procedures for preparing and implementing a rationing plan are contained in 4 Pa. Code Chapter 120, which is also enclosed. Please contact the Division of Water Use Planning at 717-772-4048 for assistance in preparing your rationing plan. Your plan must be submitted to your county emergency management agency, who will forward it to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and to the Commonwealth Drought Coordinator for review. It must be approved by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council prior to implementation.

All withdrawals for public water supply, regardless of the condition of the system, have the potential to impact stream flows and groundwater recharge, either directly or indirectly. Heavy usage within your system may impact your ability to provide adequate

fire protection. At this time, we must all be cognizant of the need to protect public health and safety, both now and in the coming months, should these drought conditions persist. We must all do our utmost to avoid the need to close businesses or affect commerce due to depleted water supplies. Preserving employment and income must remain among our priority objectives. Elimination of non-essential water uses at this time will help secure your resources for essential uses later.

#### Drought Updates By Internet

The Department will use our website to help keep you informed on drought conditions, forms and instructions, procedures, regulations, a model-rationing plan, and the latest developments. We will also post daily drought updates. Please refer to our website for the most recent drought information. You can find it at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose "Drought"). You can send information to the Drought Coordinator by E-mail at [droughtinfo@state.pa.us](mailto:droughtinfo@state.pa.us). You can also receive drought-related information from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency website at <http://www.pema.state.pa.us>.

If you have any questions, or need assistance, please feel free to contact the Division of Water Use Planning at 717-772-4048.

Sincerely,

Stuart I. Gansell  
Director and  
Pennsylvania State Drought Coordinator

Enclosures

Governor's Proclamation

[4 Pa. Code Chapter 119](#)

[35 Pa. C.S. §7707](#)

[4 Pa. Code Chapter 120](#)