

Rachel Carson State Office Building
P.O. Box 8555
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8555
February 12, 2002

Bureau of Watershed Management

717-772-4048

Dear Public Water Supplier:

On Tuesday, February 12, Governor Schweiker declared a drought "emergency" in the following 24 counties: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Bucks, Carbon, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery, Monroe, Northampton, Perry, Philadelphia, Pike, Schuylkill, Wayne and York. 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 Schweiker 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 areas, precipitation, streamflow and groundwater levels are substantially below normal, and in many areas have been at record low levels. Accumulated precipitation deficiencies over the past 365 days range as high as 14 inches in the affected counties. Continuing precipitation deficits, combined with near or record low ground water levels during this period of the year, when ground water should be recovering, portend serious conditions this summer if substantial recovery is not realized during the next two months.

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.

Bans on Nonessential Use of Water

All citizens in the emergency areas 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.

County Drought Management Task Forces

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.

Drought Contingency Plans

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 50 or more service connections submit contingency plans to the Department by March 14, if you do not have a plan that has been approved by the Department within the past three years. Three copies of your plan should be sent to the Commonwealth Drought Coordinator at the Bureau's address listed on this letterhead. An additional copy of your plan must also be forwarded to each county in which you provide service. Forms and instructions for completing a drought contingency plan can be accessed on our Drought Information Center website at:

<http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/subject/hotopics/drought/suppliers.htm>.

If your plan has been approved within the past three years, you should update it as necessary to reflect changes in your sources or significant changes in your system demands. Three copies of updated plans must also be submitted to the Department by March 14, with an additional copy to each county in which you provide service. If your plan has been approved within the past three years, and no update is necessary, then you must submit a copy to each county in which you provide service. Your plan need not be submitted to the Department.

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 and approved by the Commonwealth Drought Coordinator 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 nonessential water uses at this time will help secure your resources for essential uses later.

Drought Updates By Internet

You may rely upon our website to help keep you informed about the most recent drought conditions, forms and instructions, procedures, regulations, a model-rationing plan, and the latest developments. Our website is located 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." 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
Bureau of Watershed Management and
Commonwealth Drought Coordinator

Enclosures

Governor's Proclamation
4 Pa. Code Chapter 119
35 Pa. C.S. §7707
4 Pa. Code Chapter 120