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Harrisburg, PA 17105-8555

August 8, 2001

Bureau of Watershed Management

717-772-4048

Office of Commonwealth Drought Coordinator

- - - DROUGHT WATCH - - -

Dear Public Water Supplier:

We are writing to inform you about the drought watch declaration, which Secretary Hess announced on August 8 on behalf of Governor Tom Ridge. The drought watch includes the following 23 counties, generally located in central and southcentral Pennsylvania: Adams, Bedford, Blair, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Perry, Schuylkill, Snyder, Union, and York.

The declaration comes in response to low ground water levels and continuing precipitation deficits. After some recovery that resulted from Hurricane Allison in June, ground water levels throughout the area have declined in response to generally hot and dry weather during July. Twelve-month accumulated precipitation deficits range from about 7 to 12 inches in the affected area.

A few public water suppliers in the area are experiencing problems at this time. Now is the time to begin conserving ground water supplies for late summer and early fall when those supplies become naturally depleted by summer drawdowns. Ground water normally depletes during the summer/fall months and does not recover until after the foliage is down in the late fall. Until that time, evapo-transpiration consumes nearly all rainfall that does not run off directly to streams, and very little if any rainfall penetrates to our ground water aquifers.

Please review your drought contingency plan and update your plan if necessary to account for any changes in either your sources or the demands on your system. If you do not have a drought contingency plan, you should be preparing one. If you are preparing one for the first time, we have information available to help you, and we can provide technical assistance. Call our Division of Water Use Planning at the number above if you need assistance. After you have completed your plan, you should submit it to us for review and approval.

We encourage you to use the Drought Information Center on our web site at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose Drought Information Center). We post drought updates on that site on a regular basis to keep you informed of emerging conditions. That site also either provides or links to information that is useful for monitoring conditions in your area or for educating your customers in various methods of conserving water. If you have a web site, you may wish to consider linking directly to our site, so your customers will have ready access to our information as well.

Remember, in a drought watch, we should all be seeking to reduce water use by about 5 percent through voluntary conservation measures. During a warning, our goal is 10-15 percent reductions, still through voluntary measures. Under a gubernatorial emergency proclamation, bans on nonessential water uses become mandatory, and water rationing may also be employed if necessary, with the approval of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council. Prudent use of our resources now can help to prevent, or at least delay, the need for emergency measures later.

If you have any questions, or we can be of assistance to you in any way, please feel free to contact our Division of Water Use Planning at the telephone number listed above.

Sincerely,

Stuart I. Gansell
Director
Bureau of Watershed Management and
Commonwealth Drought Coordinator