

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Dept. of Environmental Protection

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DEP Declares Drought Watch for Western Pennsylvania Counties

HARRISBURG -- The Department of Environmental Protection today issued a drought watch for 15 Western Pennsylvania counties.

"A hot, dry summer made it necessary to take this first step of declaring a drought watch in the affected counties," DEP Secretary Mike Krancer said. "This measure will alert the public and water suppliers that there are voluntary, common-sense ways to conserve."

A drought watch declaration is the first and least severe level of the state's three drought classifications. It calls for a voluntary five percent reduction in nonessential water use and puts large water consumers on notice to begin planning for the possibility of reduced water supplies.

The 15 counties under the drought watch issued today are Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Venango, Warren and Washington.

Precipitation deficits over the past 90 days are as great as 5.5 inches below normal in Beaver County and 4.9 inches below normal in Lawrence and Mercer counties.

DEP is notifying all water suppliers in the affected areas of the need to monitor their supplies and update their drought contingency plans as necessary.

Through a cooperative program with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), DEP helps fund a statewide network of gages to monitor groundwater levels and stream flows. This network provides the state's drought coordinator with comprehensive data that is used to determine drought classifications. In addition to precipitation, groundwater and stream flow levels, DEP monitors soil moisture and water supply storage. This data is shared with other state and federal agencies.

Residents can take a number of steps to conserve water, including:

- Install low-flow plumbing fixtures and aerators on faucets.
- Check for household leaks. A leaking toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water each day.
- Take short showers instead of baths.
- Replace older appliances with high-efficiency, front-loading models that use about 30 percent less water and 40 to 50 percent less energy.
- Run dishwashers and washing machines only with full loads.
- Keep water in the refrigerator to avoid running water from a faucet until it is cold.

DEP also offers water conservation recommendations and water audit procedures for commercial and industrial users, such as food processors, hotels and educational institutions. These recommendations and additional drought information are available by visiting DEP's website, www.dep.state.pa.us, keyword: drought.

