

Drought Watch Information Summary for Public Elected Officials (Legislator/Mayor)

The DEP expects to designate a Drought Watch for the three most impacted areas of the State – the Northeast, Central and Coastal North drought regions some time tomorrow (9/23/15). The affected drought regions encompass all or parts of twelve New Jersey counties, including Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset and Union counties.

A Drought Watch is a non-regulatory action (nothing ordered or required) and is the first level of response that DEP takes when addressing dry weather conditions that begin to impact drinking water supply indicators. These indicators explained in the FAQs below are used to gauge the current level of water supply sources compared to a long-term average:

No water supply sources are in immediate jeopardy currently, but this action allows the DEP to inform the public and water suppliers alike about the dry conditions, unseasonably high water demands, and the need to voluntarily conserve water to maintain existing supplies. Intervention through the DEP's non-emergency powers now seeks to avoid a Drought Warning or Water Emergency and more drastic measures should present conditions continue (as they are forecast to do).

I've cut-and-pasted some FAQs for questions you might get from State/County/Local officials, but you can always refer folks to our dedicated Drought web site: www.njdrought.org.

1. **Q.** What is a “**drought watch**”?

A. A drought Watch is an administrative designation made by the Department when drought or other factors begin to adversely affect water supply conditions. A Watch indicates that conditions are dry but not yet significantly so. During a drought Watch, the Department closely monitors drought indicators (including precipitation, stream flows and reservoir and ground water levels, and water demands) and consults with affected water suppliers.

The Watch designation is used to alert the public about deteriorating conditions; at the same time, water-supply professionals are reminded to keep a close eye on conditions and update contingency plans in the event that dry conditions continue or worsen. The public is encouraged to practice wise water use in order to preserve supplies.

2. **Q.** Are State-imposed mandatory water use restrictions in place at this time?

A. No, **mandatory** restrictions imposed by the State of New Jersey are not currently in effect. You should, however, check with your water supplier, municipality and county to ensure that no restrictions have been imposed at those levels. Furthermore, everyone should voluntarily use water wisely to help avoid the potential of a water shortage.

3. **Q.** What are the drought indicators and how are they used?

A. The Department utilizes several drought indicators to assess the status of water supply conditions for

each of six drought regions in the State. The indicators are precipitation, stream flow, shallow ground water levels, and reservoir storage (as applicable). Each indicator is weighted according to its importance within a particular region (e.g. reservoirs are a significant factor in the Northeast drought region because they are a critical water supply source there).

The indicators are ranked according to the status of current conditions relative to a statistical average. Each is then evaluated as either: near/above normal, moderately dry, severely dry, or extremely dry. The indicators are one set of factors the Department uses to determine if a drought-related administrative action (i.e. watch, warning, or emergency) is warranted.

4. **Q.** What can I do to conserve water?

A. Using water wisely can stretch existing supplies a long way and may avert the need for mandatory water use restrictions. The majority of water is used outside the home during summer to irrigate lawn and landscapes; unfortunately, much of that water is not used efficiently and ultimately is wasted.

- Watering your lawn once or twice per week for no more than 30 minutes is more than adequate to sustain your lawn. **If it rains, there is no need to water.** Also, watering your lawn after sunset and before 8:00 a.m. avoids excessive evaporation and reduces water waste.
- Remember to check for local water use restrictions as well as guidance from your water supplier. Often such restrictions allow for you to water on odd or even numbered days of the month, depending on your address.
- To save water and money in the home, fix leaky faucets and pipes, and turn off the faucet while brushing teeth and shaving. Install water conserving faucets and showerheads. Run washing machines and dishwashers only when full.
- A complete list of water conservation tips appears on the NJ Drought web page (www.njdrought.org).