

Department of Health's Role During a Drought Emergency

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The Department of Health regulates more than 16,000 public water systems in Washington, serving more than five million people. Our goal is to ensure our communities have safe and reliable drinking water.

During a drought emergency, the state Department of Health:

- Works with the Governor's Office, the Department of Ecology, and other state agencies to monitor drought impacts on water supplies.
- Provides technical assistance to at-risk water systems, including helping them apply for emergency grants.
- Helps water systems manage and conserve water and restore safe and reliable water in the event shortages or outages do occur.
- Educates water systems, operators, and consumers about what they can do to help ensure an adequate water supply for people, agriculture, businesses and fish.

Communities most vulnerable to drought-related water shortages

Each water system is unique, and neighboring water systems may experience the drought very differently depending on their sources of water, their water storage capability, and the condition of their facilities. In general, water systems that depend on surface water sources may be more vulnerable in times of drought. Reduced stream flows can affect water intakes and reservoir levels, which can reduce available water supply.

Other vulnerable water systems include those that depend on local rainfall. Water systems in coastal and island areas, and those with shallow wells and springs (typically with a depth of less than 150 feet) are at highest risk for drought impacts.

Running out of water and other impacts on water systems

During times of high demand and drought, some smaller water systems may fail. Extended hot spells can increase the demand for water, stressing a water system's ability to keep up with demand. Pumps and other mechanical systems could break, causing a loss of pressure or water outage, creating an opportunity for contamination to enter the water system and raising health concerns.



What you can do to help

We can all help protect our water supplies. **The best way to reduce the strain on your water system is to use less water.** The biggest residential use of water is outdoors: watering the lawn, gardening, and landscaping. Most landscapes can be healthy with 25 to 40 percent less water than they typically get.

Other actions you can take include:

- If you're landscaping, seek out water-wise plants.
- Postpone large plantings, if possible, until the rains return in the fall.
- Wash full loads of clothes and dishes.
- Fix leaking toilets and faucets.
- Don't leave water running in your bathroom or kitchen sinks.

For more information

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