
Notice to Public Drinking Water Systems

Ongoing Dry Conditions in California – Prepare for Drought Impacts Statewide

Water Source Contingency and Conservation Planning

June 8th, 2021

With California experiencing its second consecutive dry year, and due to the effects of climate change, we are all reminded that drought planning and conservation are now a California way of life.

The first six months of water year 2021 rank as the fourth driest on record. With warm temperatures and extended dry conditions, melting Sierra Nevada snow is soaking into parched ground rather than running into reservoirs. On some streams, runoff is lower now than during the critically dry year of 2014–15.

These conditions may contribute to reduced yield from your ground and/or surface water supply sources, challenges with water quality, and difficulties in meeting normal system demands resulting in water shortages or low pressure during peak demand periods, such as those that normally occur in the late summer and early fall months.

Sustained preparation and planning are critical. Most of California's water systems were able to manage drought impacts and maintain the high quality of water delivered to their customers during the last drought by taking actions early.

The State Water Resources Control Board urges you to prioritize three actions: 1) closely evaluate your water supply; 2) develop a contingency plan to mitigate any water supply problems that might result from current and future conditions, and 3) encourage your customers to conserve water voluntarily. The following components should be included in your system evaluation and drought contingency plan:

Evaluate Your Water Supply

An accurate determination of the system source capacity, including ground water levels, well yields, well-pumping capacities and pump bowl settings (depth to the pump's intake). The information you collect should include the following:

- a. **Monitor the depth-to-ground-water level in your wells under both pumping and non-pumping conditions:** Depth-to-groundwater is a very good indicator of well capacity. Too often, a well's pumping capacity is used as the sole indicator of pumping conditions with no attention given to ground water depth. As a result, depletion of the ground water table over time may not be apparent. In addition, not monitoring groundwater levels over pump bowls can ruin good pumping equipment if excessive drawdown in the groundwater table allows air to enter the pumping equipment. **If water levels drop below your pump bowl settings, significant damage to pump impellers, bearings and motors is likely to occur. As a result, your system could be without water until a new pump can be installed, and you might encounter significant equipment and labor costs to replace burned-out pumps and motors.**

- b. **Read and record well pumping capacity:** We *strongly* recommend that you read and record your well flow totalizing meter on a regular basis. This can help you monitor usage and identify your degree of water loss or "unaccounted-for-water." Unaccounted-for-water is the difference between the water you produce from your sources and the amount actually delivered to customers.

- c. **Monitor and record the water levels in your system storage tanks during various high-demand periods of the day:** We recommend that you monitor and record the level of the water in your storage tanks at the same time each day, which will help you identify increasing system demand or reduced source capacity conditions that can lead to major supply problems.

- d. **Repair any obvious leaks in your storage tanks and distribution system.** If your distribution system is over 25 years old, consider starting a leak detection program to identify and repair leaks in your distribution system that may not be obvious, particularly unaccounted-for-water losses. Water that is not wasted through unrepaired leaks will be available to customers when needed. It will also save you money, because you will consume less power for pumping water that will ultimately be wasted anyway.

Create a Contingency Plan

To start your drought contingency plan, review your past water use data and anticipate upcoming demand. Then, plan appropriately for anticipated shortages. Minimally, your plan should include:

- a. **Serious water conservation measures that will help mitigate water shortage problems:** If your system has experienced water shortages in prior years, and additional source capacity has not been brought online, it is imperative to begin conservation efforts immediately. Outdoor watering, and other non-essential water use should be curtailed.

- b. **A temporary or permanent interconnection to a neighboring utility that has excess production capacity:** Such interconnections should be discussed with the appropriate [Division of Drinking Water District office](#) before implemented. Arrangements for an interconnection should be made ahead of an emergency, so now is the time to plan one if appropriate.
- c. **Installation of treatment on standby sources that have water quality issues:** If you anticipate that you will need to treat standby sources to maintain drinking water quality standards, begin the planning and permitting process now and install the necessary equipment as soon as possible. Treatment equipment and constructional materials are already in tight supply and may not be available later to cover an emergency installation. Some treatment requires testing before it can come online, and this should be considered in your planning timeline.
- d. **Join a Mutual Aid & Assistance Program:** Belonging to mutual aid associations, such as California Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (CalWARN), will give you access to information on topics like emergency preparedness, disaster response, and mutual assistance processes for public and private water and wastewater utilities. Benefits include a mutual assistance agreement, process for sharing emergency resources among signatories statewide, and resources to respond and recover more quickly from a disaster or drought.

It is important that even for systems that use groundwater wells that have never experienced an outage, you take steps to verify water table depth and well pump settings as indicated above. If you believe your water system will be facing water shortage problems, we recommend you contact your district office to alert them and work through the steps needed to remain in compliance.

Create awareness that voluntary conservation is critical

Conservation extends existing supplies, helping to ensure California's communities and ecosystems weather this crisis. The State Water Board urges you to work with all customers in your service area to voluntarily reduce:

- a. Watering of outdoor landscapes that causes incidental runoff onto adjacent property, non-irrigated areas, private and public walkways, roadways, parking lots, or structures.
- b. Individuals washing privately-owned cars with a hose, unless they are using a positive action shut-off nozzle.
- c. Applying potable water directly to driveways and sidewalks.
- d. Using potable water in an ornamental fountain or other decorative water feature.

- e. Using water to irrigate turf and ornamental landscapes during and within 48 hours after measurable rainfall.
- f. Serving drinking water that was not requested in eating or drinking establishments.
- g. Irrigating turf on public street medians or publicly owned and/or maintained landscaped areas between the street and sidewalk.

The State Water Board also encourages you to coordinate with:

- a. Hotels and motels to ensure they allow guests to opt out of having towels and linens laundered daily.
- b. Homeowners' associations, community service organizations, or similar entities to ensure they support water-efficient landscaping.

For more information about water supply planning, water conservation, drought-related events, and more, visit the Water Board's new [drought webpages](#). They include a new visualization tool that allows you to explore water system supplies and demands. The [water conservation portal](#) offers water-saving tips and suggested conservation measures, references to policies and laws, and more resources. These pages will be continuously updated so check back regularly.

Thank you for your continued partnership in ensuring Californians have access to high quality water. Together, we can make every drop count.