

Drought



Introduction

A drought means a prolonged period of shortages in the water supply. It can happen after an unusually low period of rainfall, for an extended period of time.

Without normal levels of rainfall, reserve water levels start to fall and plants, crops and aquatic eco systems can die. If the dry period continues, it can become a drought.

In the UK, the [Environment Agency \(EA\)](#) decides when we are in drought conditions. The EA works together with water companies to reduce the impact of drought for people in affected areas.

The summer of 2022 was notably hot, with maximum temperatures far above average across much of England, and new record highs for Wales and Scotland. A new UK record temperature of 40.3°C at Coningsby in Lincolnshire was recorded on 19 July and the season was generally settled with little rain during most of July and August. Summer 2022 (June-August) registered as the fifth driest for England and Wales in a series from 1836. This combination of dry and hot weather meant that June-August in England was one hottest and driest on record.

Interesting Fact

Rainfall for summer 2022 across the whole of the UK was low, with less than two-thirds recorded compared to the 1991-2020 average. Many regions, particularly in England, received less than half the average rainfall, including Severn Trent, Yorkshire, Anglian, Thames, Wessex and South West. The Anglian, Thames and Wessex regions all recorded their fifth driest summer in records since 1836.

Local Risk Rating

Heatwaves are assessed as 'Medium' on our Community Risk Register

Impact	Moderate (3)	Likelihood	Medium Low (2)	Rating	Medium
--------	--------------	------------	----------------	--------	--------



What is the LRF doing about it?

[Forecasts by the Environment Agency](#) for 2023 suggested that if winter was dry, with 80% or less of the usual amount of winter rainfall, then large parts of the country would likely be at risk of drought continuing into the next summer. Around two-thirds of water companies would see their supply areas impacted by these conditions. Such a dry winter would risk the start of 2023 reflecting the position at the start of 1976.

What happens with the weather between winter and summer dictates whether temporary use bans are necessary when the temperature rises. Water companies have a huge role to play but there are things we can all do to minimise the likelihood of summer restrictions. While we can't rule out another summer like 1976, we are more resilient than we've ever been and water companies work hard to ensure those memories of standpipes in the street remain where they belong, in the past.

We are not waiting for the rain to fall - all sectors are planning for all rainfall scenarios and take necessary action over winter months to improve supplies and resilience for the next year. For example, water companies can apply for drought permits to help refill reservoirs and work together with farmers and others to explore opportunities to support each other and protect the environment.



How to prepare for a drought and water shortage?

Water is a precious resource – it sustains life. We can all do our bit to help conserve water. Cutting back could even help to bring down our bills!

Saving water indoors

- Make sure your home is leak-free. Take a reading of your water meter.
- Wait 30 minutes without using any water and then take a second reading. If the reading changes – you have a leak.
- Repair dripping faucets by changing washers – one drop per second wastes 2,700 gallons per year.

Saving water in the kitchen and bathroom

- Only use dishwashers when they're full.
- Don't waste water while waiting for it to become hot or cold – capture it for other uses
- Use washing machines when they're full, or set the water level for the size of your load.
- Take shorter showers and cut out baths.
- Don't let the water run while brushing your teeth or washing your face.

Saving water outside

- There's good evidence that grassy lawns grow back when it rains!
- Consider using a commercial car wash which recycles water
- Get a water butt. When it does rain, you'll have a supply