

Our plans to manage droughts

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Introduction

This is our draft plan for how we'll supply fresh, reliable water to our customers during droughts, while also protecting the environment.

On an average day, we supply around 175 million litres of water to nearly 740,000 customers, as well as to businesses.

Around 90% of the water we supply comes from chalk groundwater sources, with the other 10% from the River Itchen. We rely on winter rain to keep these groundwater sources topped up, so if there's much less rain than usual, particularly

over consecutive winters, a drought can develop.

Droughts also affect the environment and wildlife in our area, much of which is protected.

We all need to play our part early on in droughts to leave as much water as possible in our environment, while we focus on maintaining supplies to customers.



Our updated plan

We update our Drought Plans every five years, and this one considers feedback from customers, lessons learnt from droughts in 2022 and 2025 and new laws to protect the environment.

Another key change is looking at more actions we can take to delay moving to emergency restrictions in a very severe drought.

We've worked closely with five other water companies in the South East as we've updated our plan so we can work together to promote water saving and co-ordinate our actions during a drought.

We're carrying out a consultation on this updated plan from 22 May to 14 August and we'd very much like your feedback. Please see [page 17](#) to take part.

What is a drought?

Droughts happen when there's less rain than usual, leading to a shortage of water for people, the environment, farming and industry. Droughts most likely to affect our area are not caused by a few days or weeks of hot weather, but several seasons of low rain, particularly during winter when it's most needed to refill underground stores.



Our Drought Plan

Our Drought Plan sets out the actions we'll take during a drought.

We monitor water levels in the ground continuously and when they drop below a certain level, it triggers the different stages of our plan. We also monitor how much water is being used to help us manage the situation.

Along with other water companies, we use a traffic light system to show the different levels of drought and what actions we'll take and when.

Normal	No Drought
Level 1	Prolonged dry weather
Level 2	Drought
Level 3	Severe Drought
Level 4	Emergency Drought
After a drought	Lessons learnt

This table shows the actions we'll take as a drought progresses:

	Saving water	Supplying water and protecting the environment	Keeping you up to date and working with partners
Level 0 Normal	Promote water saving Find and fix leaks Fit smart water meters	Monitor water levels Normal water supply	Water efficiency messages online Promotion of free devices and Get Water Fit tools Coordination with other water companies and regulators
Level 1 Prolonged dry weather (Trigger 1)	Do more to find and fix leaks Promote water efficiency and water savings Reduce water pressure where possible (within set limits) Coordinate with other water companies	Monitor water levels and the environment	Highlight the dry weather and higher demand for water Target water-saving advice to homes, businesses and drier areas Update councils, environmental groups, Citizens Advice groups Email or SMS updates to customers Provide advice for vulnerable customers if restrictions are to be introduced
Level 2 Drought (Trigger 2)	Introduce Temporary Use Bans (TUBs) for households to save water (formerly known as hosepipe bans) Contact vulnerable customers Apply for a Non-essential Use Ban (NEUB) to increase restrictions and for businesses to save water	Prepare to apply for a drought permit to take more water from an existing groundwater source in West Sussex Monitor water levels and the environment	Explain there is a drought and why Announce TUBs, exemptions and how to apply for exemptions Issue press releases, social media, interviews Target sensitive areas and higher water-use areas Coordinate with other water companies, NAVs - who supply their customers from our sources, and regulators

	Saving water	Supplying water and protecting the environment	Keeping you up to date and working with partners
Level 3 Severe Drought (Trigger 3a)	<p>Introduce Non-essential Use Ban restrictions</p>	<p>Apply for a drought permit to take more water from an existing groundwater source in West Sussex</p> <p>Monitor the environment</p> <p>Prepare to introduce ‘more before 4’ options to avoid emergency measures</p>	<p>Explain there is a severe drought and why</p> <p>Explain NEUB restrictions and target messages at affected businesses</p> <p>Directly engage with vulnerable customers</p> <p>Hold public events to promote water saving</p> <p>Regular updates to environmental groups, councils, interested groups and regional and national drought co-ordination</p>
Severe Drought (Trigger 3b)	<p>Introduce ‘more before 4’ actions to reduce water use – promote further reduction in water use</p> <p>Support vulnerable customers</p>	<p>Supply more water from the West Sussex source</p> <p>Introduce extreme drought options, such as changing pumps at sources to pump at lower water levels</p>	<p>Strong calls to reduce water use, with clear, practical steps</p> <p>National campaigns and ‘Day Zero’ messages to warn of next steps</p> <p>Wider media and social messages, backed by regional campaigns</p> <p>Updates on use of the West Sussex source and steps to protect the environment</p>
Level 4 Extreme Drought Emergency Plan (Trigger 4)	<p>Move to our Emergency Plan, which includes rota cuts (where water is rationed to set times in the day) and standpipes</p> <p>Work with the Government</p>	<p>Move to our Emergency Plan, which includes increasing abstraction of water above our usual set limits</p>	<p>Clear communication of emergency measures e.g. standpipes and rota cuts</p> <p>Messages on essential supplies and safety information</p> <p>Regulator updates across all available channels</p> <p>Coordinated messages with regional and UK groups and Government</p>

What we'll ask you to do to save water

In a drought, we'll bring in restrictions on water use to help supplies last longer and help protect the environment and wildlife.

We've agreed with other water companies in the South East to use the same restrictions and exemptions, so it's clear what everyone should do.

During 'normal' times when there is no drought, we:

- Support everyone to save water every day, with advice and water-saving products
- Are installing smart water meters for all homes and businesses by 2035
- Work round the clock to find and fix leaks – and we'll reduce them by half by 2040.

We'll step up these activities during dry weather and if water levels are starting to drop. By supporting everyone to use water efficiently, we can delay restrictions for as long as possible.



Temporary Use Bans

If we move into a drought, we'll do more to fix leaks, promote water-saving and prepare to bring in Temporary Use Bans (TUBs).

Because hosepipes can use a lot of water very quickly, these bans mean you can't use a hosepipe for some activities.

Before introducing TUBs at Level 2 of a drought, we'd consult with customers and other organisations over a two-week period.

Temporary Use Bans mainly restrict water at home. They mean you need to stop using hosepipes for:

- Watering a garden – a garden includes a garden and lawn at home, a park, gardens open to the public, grass verges, grass used for sport and recreation, allotments and any other green space
- Cleaning a private motor vehicle
- Watering plants at domestic premises
- Cleaning a private leisure boat
- Any domestic recreational use
- Filling or maintaining a domestic pond
- Cleaning walls and windows of domestic buildings
- Cleaning paths or patios
- Cleaning other artificial outdoor surfaces.

Also, stop using water for:

- Filling or maintaining a domestic swimming or paddling pool
- Filling or maintaining an ornamental fountain.



Exemptions from the restrictions

We've agreed exemptions to these restrictions to help protect vulnerable customers and support businesses and jobs for as long as possible.

If you feel you should be granted an exemption that isn't listed, you can contact us during a drought.

We will automatically allow exemptions for:

- Customers on our Priority Services Register (if you need to use a hosepipe to do certain activities for accessibility reasons, you can ask us for an exemption)
- Blue Badge holders
- Micro irrigation systems
- Commercial window, car, path, patio and boat cleaners
- Public service and goods vehicles
- Cleaning to protect health and safety

- Micro, trickle or drip irrigation systems fitted with a pressure-reducing valve and a timer
- Private boats (with a roof and walls)
- Filling or maintaining a pond where fish or aquatic animals are kept or fountains adding air to these ponds
- Watering plants that are grown for sale, are part of a National Plant Collection, temporary gardens or flower displays
- Grass or artificial outdoor surfaces used for national and international sports events.

Depending on the drought, we may also allow exemptions for:

- Private boats that are the customer's only home; where the engine needs to be cleaned with a hosepipe or where not cleaning a boat means it'll use more fuel
- Filling or maintaining a private swimming pool during construction, for medical use, animal welfare or where fish are being kept.

Non-essential water use

If a drought continues, we'd apply to the Government to extend the ban to 'non-essential' uses of water.

This next stage of restrictions is covered by a Non-essential Use Ban (NEUB) and extends restrictions to businesses.

We'd carry out a two-week consultation with our customers and organisations before we introduced a NEUB at Level 3 of a drought.

We've never needed to introduce these non-essential use restrictions.

NEUBs mean you need to stop using hosepipes for:

- Watering outdoor plants on commercial premises
- Cleaning any vehicle, boat, aircraft or railway rolling stock
- Cleaning non-domestic premises
- Cleaning a window of a non-domestic building
- Suppressing dust
- Cleaning industrial plants.

Also, stop using water for:

- Filling or maintaining a non-domestic swimming or paddling pool
- Filling or maintaining a pond
- Operating a mechanical vehicle washer
- Operating cisterns in an unoccupied building.

Exemptions from the restrictions

We've also agreed exemptions to these restrictions.

If you feel you should be granted an exemption that isn't listed, you can contact us during a drought.

We will automatically allow exemptions for:

- Watering plants that are grown for sale, are part of a National Plant Collection, temporary gardens or flower displays
- Swimming pools open to the public, used for school swimming lessons, during construction, for medical use, animal welfare or where fish are being kept
- Cleaning to protect health and safety e.g. vehicles, aircraft, non-domestic buildings and industrial plant
- Suppressing dust on health and safety grounds and to reduce environmental pollution (we advise using recycled water)
- Filling or maintaining a pond where fish or aquatic animals are kept.

Depending on the drought, we may also allow exemptions for:

- Customers on our Priority Services Register (who can contact us to request an exemption to water plants and fill ponds)
- Blue Badge Holders (to fill ponds with a hosepipe).



Supply more water

West Sussex

During a drought, we focus on supporting you to be more efficient with water and finding and fixing more leaks.

However, if a drought gets worse, we may apply for permission to take more water from a source in West Sussex.

We've chosen this underground source of water as it's least likely to affect the environment.

We would need to apply for a permit from the Environment Agency to take the water and put new equipment in place to pump and treat it.

We've already carried out an environmental study to see if the changes would affect the local area, which includes Swanbourne Lake and the wetland centre in Arundel. We would monitor the impact and put measures in place to support flows and wildlife.

River Itchen

We share supplies with Southern Water customers and both companies currently take water from the River Itchen in Hampshire for our day-to-day supplies.

In a drought it may be better for us to take more water from our abstraction point on this sensitive chalk river to protect it, rather than Southern Water taking water from its abstraction point which is higher up. This could also help us maintain our transfers to Southern Water's customers in a drought.

Considering the environment

We've carried out environmental assessments of this Drought Plan, a Strategic Environmental Assessment and a Habitats Regulation Assessment, as well as an environmental study of taking extra water from our source in West Sussex.

These show how reducing water use and leakage early on will help support the environment, as well as reduce our carbon footprint. This is because we'll need to treat and pump less water.

In severe droughts, if we need to take water while levels are low, this can affect the health of groundwater, streams and rivers. So it's important we monitor for these risks and do everything we can to reduce them.

This might include leaving water in sensitive habitats if possible and adapting how and where we take our water from as the situation changes.

You can read our environmental assessments on [our website](#).



Keeping you up to date

We will keep everyone up to date during droughts to let you know what we're doing and how you can play your part.

Together with other water companies, we've been talking to over a thousand customers since the last drought to understand the best way to communicate in a way that works for you.

As soon as we enter a dry period, we'll let you know and keep you updated, for example through our website, social media, newspapers, radio, community forums, emails and text messages.

Everything you need to know about restrictions will be on our website, with information on ways to contact us.

We'll make sure our information is clear and accessible. We'll share relevant information with customers on our Priority Services Register, our business customers, large commercial users, retailers who provide customer services and NAVs (Newly Appointed Variations) who supply our water to some customers in our area.

During a drought, we'll also liaise with local authorities as well as the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association and the fire service, as we have a legal duty to make sure there's always water available for firefighting.

We'll monitor your engagement with our messages, listen to your feedback and adapt if we need to.

Emergency plan

If a severe drought continues to get worse, we'd move to our Emergency Plan, which is separate to this Drought Plan.

This is extremely unlikely, but it could include rationing water to certain hours in the day or through standpipes in the street. We'd need permission from the Government, and our priority would be to support our most vulnerable customers.

In this Drought Plan, we've looked at steps we could take to avoid reaching Level 4 drought and these emergency actions. We call these doing 'more before 4'. They include:

- Finding and fixing even more leaks
- Reducing water pressure further
- Upgrading pumps at six of our water sources so we can continue to pump water as water levels drop.



When a drought ends

A drought ends when there's enough rain and our monitoring shows sources are returning to healthy levels.

This could take months rather than weeks and we'd move back through the drought levels and lift restrictions as soon as we can.

We'd review our actions to see what worked well and what we could do better next time. This would include asking for your feedback and sharing lessons learnt with other water companies. We review our Drought Plan each year to check if we need to update it.

How often will we need our Drought Plan?

This Drought Plan sets out the actions we'll take during a drought.

Our [Water Resources Management Plan](#) outlines how we'll secure reliable water for the next 50 years and how often we may need to take these drought actions.

We try to balance the cost of investing in new water sources with how often we plan for drought actions, to keep water bills affordable for our customers.

On average, this is how often we expect to have to take drought actions:

- Temporary Use Bans (formerly known as hosepipe bans) – once every 20 years
- Non-essential Use Bans – once every 80 years
- Drought Permit to secure more water in West Sussex – once every 125 years
- Emergency Drought Plan (extreme restrictions) – once every 200 years.

The last time we introduced TUBs/a hosepipe ban was in 1976. We haven't needed to introduce a Non-essential Use Ban or extreme restrictions to date, or use the permit to take more water in West Sussex.

Do you think we've got it right?

We'd like to know what you think about this draft Drought Plan.

This document is a summary of our draft Drought Plan 2027. You can read the full technical document and appendices [on our website](#).

You can also access a paper copy by appointment at our main office in Havant, Hampshire – please get in touch with Jim Barker by calling 023 9249 9888 or emailing head.office@portsmouthwater.co.uk.

You can share your feedback between 22 May to 14 August by completing our [web form](#), emailing Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) at water.resources@defra.gov.uk, or writing to:

Drought Plan Consultation (Portsmouth Water),
Water Resources,
Department for Environment, Food and
Rural Affairs,
3rd Floor, Seacole Building,
2 Marsham Street,
London, SW1P 4DF

Alternatively, you can complete the questionnaire below, save it as a PDF, and email it to Defra or post it to the address above.

Draft Drought Plan consultation questions

Section A: Understanding our plan

1. Do you think the way we explain drought risk and the different drought levels is clear and easy to understand?

Yes Mostly No Not sure

2. Do you understand why Portsmouth Water needs a Drought Plan to prepare for dry weather and droughts?

Yes Mostly No Not sure

Section B: Managing droughts fairly and effectively

3. We plan to reduce demand for water (for example through water-saving advice, leakage reduction and restrictions) before taking more water from the environment. Do you agree with this approach?

Yes No Not sure

4. Do you agree with the order in which drought actions would be introduced as conditions worsen?
(For example: water-saving advice → hosepipe bans → business restrictions → extreme drought measures)

Yes No Not sure

Section C: Restrictions on water use

5. Are the proposed temporary water-use restrictions for households (such as TUBs/hosepipe bans) explained clearly?

Yes Mostly No Not sure

6. Do you agree that restrictions on household water use should normally be introduced before restrictions on businesses, to help protect jobs and essential services?

Yes No Not sure

7. Do you think the proposed exemptions (for example for vulnerable customers, health and safety, and some essential activities) are reasonable?

Yes No Not sure

Section D: Protecting the environment

8. Do you agree that protecting rivers, groundwater, habitats and wildlife should remain a key consideration in how droughts are managed?

Yes No Not sure

9. In severe droughts, we may need to temporarily increase water abstraction from a specific groundwater source under strict environmental controls. Do you support the inclusion of this drought permit as part of the plan?

Yes No Not sure I would like more information

Section E: Extreme drought and emergency planning

10. Before introducing emergency measures such as standpipes or rota cuts, we plan to use additional short-term actions to reduce demand and maximise supplies. Do you support this approach?

Yes No Not sure

11. In an extreme drought, would you be willing to significantly reduce your water use if this helped avoid emergency measures?

Yes No Not sure

Section F: Communication and engagement

12. Do you think our proposed approach to communicating during dry weather and drought is clear and reassuring?

Yes Mostly No Not sure

13. What do you think is the best way for us to communicate with customers and stakeholders during a drought? Please rank in order of preference (1 = most preferred, 2 = next, etc.). Use each number only once.

<input type="checkbox"/> Email	<input type="checkbox"/> Direct texts / letters
<input type="checkbox"/> Social media	<input type="checkbox"/> Community groups / local authorities
<input type="checkbox"/> Website updates	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Local media (radio, newspapers)	

Section G: Final open question

14. Do you have any other comments on our Draft Drought Plan 2027, including anything you think we should do differently?



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