

DROUGHT PREPARATION

By Randy Hellbusch, Circuit Rider

As I am writing this article I look out the window and I see the tree branches are bent over. Another windy day. Seems as we have had more than our fair share of wind so far this spring. What we haven't had is our share of rain. Driving through the state I notice farmers frantically working the fields. It is hard to determine what they are actually doing because most often all you see is a huge dust cloud. In many instances you can't even see the implement or the tractor pulling it. Hopefully relief will come, but all we can do on that front is hope and pray.

What we can do is prepare. Does your water system have a good drought response ordinance? I know many systems developed a plan a few years back when we were experiencing periods of drought. If you have developed a drought ordinance, have you kept it updated? Has any of your system capacity issues changed? Are your water usage needs still the same as when the ordinance was written? If not, it may be a good idea to do some alterations. If you haven't developed a drought ordinance, there is no time like the present to get started.

The best method is to use benchmarks: i.e.:

Stage 1 Water Watch Triggers: Groundwater level has fallen 5 feet or Daily Demand 800,000 gals.

Stage 1 Goals: Heighten public awareness

Stage 1 Education Actions: Make occasional news releases to local media

Stage 1 Actions: Request public to curtail outdoor water use

Stage 2 Water Warning Triggers: Groundwater level has fallen 10 feet or Daily Demand 1,000,000 gals.

Stage 2 Goals: Reduce daily consumption 20%

Stage 2 Education Actions: Increase news releases to media describing present conditions

Stage 2 Actions: Implement Mandatory limits on outdoor water use

Stage 3 Water Emergency Triggers: Groundwater levels have fallen 20 feet or Daily Demand 1,500,000 gals.

Stage 3 Goals: Reduce daily consumption 50%

Stage 3 Education Actions: Make daily news releases, hold public meeting to inform citizens of the status

Stage 3 Actions: Ban all outdoor water use

The above is just a generic example using hypothetical figures. It is important to know **your** system and understand at what point the situation becomes critical. If you would like assistance in developing or revising your drought ordinance give us at NerWA a call. We would be glad to assist you.