

NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

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DROUGHT EMERGENCY LIFTED IN 14 COUNTIES

All 67 Pennsylvania counties downgraded to drought watch

HARRISBURG (March 15) - Lt. Gov. Mark Schweiker today announced that Gov. Tom Ridge has lifted the drought emergency declaration for 14 counties and downgraded all 67 counties to a drought watch.

"We have seen a significant recovery in stream flows, precipitation and groundwater levels across the Commonwealth," said Lt. Gov. Schweiker, chairman of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council. "In light of these improved conditions, the Governor has decided to allow the drought emergency declaration to lapse in the 14 hardest hit counties."

Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Jefferson, Lycoming, Snyder and Somerset counties were declared in emergency on Dec. 16 by Gov. Ridge. Clinton and Erie counties were added to the declaration on Jan. 15. These counties now join the remaining 53 counties in a drought watch.

A drought watch is the first and least severe of the three

drought declarations under the state's drought-operating plan.

It calls for a voluntary 5 percent reduction of non-essential water use. A drought warning, the second stage of the three drought declarations, calls for a 10 percent voluntary reduction in water consumption. A drought emergency, the third and most severe stage, imposes mandatory restrictions on water use.

"We are still asking people to use water wisely by taking shorter showers, running the dishwasher or washing machine only when full, and not letting the water run when shaving or brushing their teeth," DEP Secretary James M Seif said. "Since March is the last month before the growing season, it is still critical that residents conserve water."

Once the growing season begins, crops will begin to feed off of groundwater supplies. Any precipitation that falls will get absorbed by the ground and then used by the crops. Since almost half of Pennsylvania gets its drinking water from wells, lack of precipitation during the growing season can lead to loss of water supplies.

The latest drought information including precipitation tables and water-conservation tips are available on the Pennsylvania homepage at www.state.pa.us, or directly on DEP's website at www.dep.state.pa.us (choose Subjects/Water Management/Drought).

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