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Drought Watch Declared For New York City Water Supply

Water Conservation Encouraged

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has declared an official Drought Watch for the City's Water Supply System, according to an announcement by DEP Commissioner Joel A. Miele Sr., P.E. The City declares a Drought Watch when there is less than a fifty percent chance that either the Delaware System or Catskill System reservoirs will be full by June 1, the start of the water year when the reservoirs are normally full. That determination is reached through careful analyses of the historic records of reservoir levels and precipitation.

"Despite some inflow to the reservoirs from recent precipitation, the drought line was crossed on Sunday, December 23," said Commissioner Miele. "That means all of us who rely on the City's Water Supply - over eight million consumers in the City and another million in four upstate counties - must make concerted efforts to conserve water."

Currently, the City's reservoirs are at 44.4% of capacity, 32 percentage points below the normal level of 76.4% for this date. The low water levels are attributed to below average rainfall in the City's nearly 2,000-square-mile watershed over the last several months. Additionally, this summer, the City released a record amount --110 billion gallons -- to maintain flow in the Delaware River.

In recent weeks, both the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) have declared drought alerts in parts of the watersheds that feed New York City's reservoirs. DEC has issued a Drought Watch followed by Drought Warning for 13 counties in southeastern New York, including the eight watershed counties of the City's Water Supply. Last week, DRBC declared a Drought Emergency, which was preceded by both a Drought Watch and a Drought Warning. DRBC's declaration reduces the amount of water that the City can withdraw from its Delaware System.

In recent years, daily water use in the City has been averaging about 1.2 billion gallons per day, well below the 1.45 billion gallons consumed in 1991. The dramatic reduction in consumption is attributable to several comprehensive water conservation measures implemented in the City and by

DEP over the last ten years, including the installation of water meters and of nearly 1.7 million low-flow toilets and other plumbing fixtures. Without those conservation measures, the City would have declared a Drought Watch several weeks ago.

Delaware River Basin water resources include the City's Pepacton, Cannonsville and Neversink Reservoirs. Those reservoirs along with the Rondout Reservoir comprise the Delaware System, which provides roughly half of New York City's water supply. In addition to water from the Delaware System, the balance of the City's drinking water comes from Catskill area reservoirs (40%) and from the Croton water system (10%).

Commissioner Miele is urging residents and businesses to practice voluntary water conservation to help extend the current water supply. Simple tips for conserving water include operating dishwashers and washing machines only when full, taking shorter showers or shallow baths, and sweeping sidewalks clean instead of using a water hose. Other important conservation measures include fixing faucet leaks, which can waste hundreds of gallons of water every week, and reporting illegally opened hydrants to DEP's 24-hour helpline, 718/DEP-HELP (718/337-4357). New Yorkers may read more about water conservation and the City's water supply on-line at <http://www.nyc.gov/dep>.

Water Saving Tips

1. Report open fire hydrants and street leaks to DEP's 24-hour helpline, 718/DEP-HELP. An open hydrant can waste one million gallons of drinking water per day.
2. Take advantage of DEP's free water survey to help save water and cut water bills in residential and commercial buildings. To apply City residents can call 718/DEP-HELP.
3. Take shorter showers or fill the tub only halfway and save water.
4. Don't run the tap while shaving or brushing your teeth.
5. Fix leaks. Leaky faucets alone can waste up to 1,000 gallons each week.
6. Run the dishwasher and washing machine only when full. Use short cycles if available.
7. Don't use the toilet as a wastebasket. Each unnecessary flush can waste 1.6 to 5 gallons.
8. Install water-saving fixtures including toilets, showerheads and faucet aerators.
9. Sweep driveways and sidewalks clean rather than washing them down with a hose.
10. For more water saving ideas visit DEP's Web site at <http://www.nyc.gov/dep>