



## Drought Guidance for Municipalities

Persistent drought conditions in New Hampshire often lead to residential well failures and put stress on public water system supplies. Municipalities have an important role to play in mitigating drought impacts. Actions a municipality may take include the following:

- Implement outdoor water use restrictions.
- Establish an emergency location where residents may access water.
- Communicate with the public on drought conditions, the importance of conserving water, and water conservation tips.
- Provide residents relying on residential wells with information on how to address drought impacts and the contact for reporting impacts.
- Provide NHDES with information on water restrictions and emergency access locations for posting on the [NHDES Drought Management webpage](#).

You will find further guidance below related to these actions, including a link to a model regulation for restricting lawn watering, emergency access well testing information, outreach materials for the public and residential well owners, and a list of state contacts.

### **Drought Conditions**

To stay informed on the latest drought conditions and current drought-related information, visit the [NHDES Drought Management webpage](#).

### **Water Use Information**

Residential water use is the largest consumptive water use in New Hampshire outside of energy production. Average indoor water use per capita in New Hampshire is approximately 63 gallons per day. In the summer, total water use increases to 93 gallons per capita per day due to outdoor water use, which can mostly be attributed to lawn watering. Some communities have a higher proportion of in-ground irrigation systems and experience doubling of water use in the summer. Restricting lawn watering and other outdoor uses can result in a significant reduction in stress on water supplies.

### **Outdoor Water Use Model Regulation**

When relying on model regulations, recognize that input from water suppliers in the state and a study on water restrictions show that significant reductions in water use only occur when mandatory restrictions are implemented. Hundreds of residential wells have gone dry during more recent droughts, and homeowners who retained well contractors to improve their wells experienced a significant wait as a result of increased demand for services. Implementing a mandatory restriction early-on during the drought is recommended.

### *Authority to Impose Outdoor Water Use Restrictions on Customers:*

RSA 38:26 states that municipalities with public water systems have the power to adopt rules regarding the use of municipal water. In those municipalities, the governing body, or the board of water commissioners if the system is run by water commissioners, may adopt such ordinances and bylaws relating to the system or structures as required for proper maintenance and operation.

NHDES Web Site: [www.des.nh.gov](http://www.des.nh.gov)

P.O. Box 95, 29 Hazen Drive, Concord, New Hampshire 03302-0095

Telephone: (603) 271-2513 Fax: (603) 271-5171 TDD Access: Relay NH 1-800-735-2964

The New Hampshire Safe Drinking Water Act, RSA 485, further provides community water systems with the authority to restrict non-essential water use when there is a threat of demand exceeding supply and to terminate service to customers when customers refuse to follow those restrictions ([Env-Dw 503](#)). For further guidance, including a model ordinance on implementing outdoor water use restrictions on customers, refer to [Implementing Water Use Restrictions at Public Water Systems](#).

*Authority to Restrict Lawn Watering During a Drought within Municipal Boundaries:*

Pursuant to [RSA 41:11-d](#) Restricting the Watering of Lawns, during a drought, municipalities and village districts have the authority to adopt regulations to restrict lawn watering within municipal boundaries, including on private well owners. The purpose of this type of restriction is to protect supplies to meet the community's critical needs and to prevent residential wells from experiencing water shortages at the expense of another's non-essential use. For further guidance on implementing lawn watering restrictions pursuant to RSA 41:11-d, including a model regulation and press release, refer to [Municipal and Village District Lawn Watering Restrictions During State or Federally Declared Droughts](#).

Note that RSA 41:11-d only provides authority to limit lawn watering, is only applicable when the municipality is experiencing drought conditions, and requires specific steps to be followed that may take several days before the restriction may be enforced.

It is also a good idea to coordinate with other community water systems within the municipality. To look up contact information for the community water systems in your municipality, go to [OneStop](#), check "Public Water System" in the "Specific Areas of Interest" section, select the municipality in the "Town/City" field in the "Location" section, scroll down to the "System Type" box, check "Community Water System," and click the "Enter" button.

**Reporting Restrictions to NHDES for Publicizing**

During drought, NHDES maintains a list of water systems and municipalities implementing outdoor water use restrictions on the [NHDES Drought Management webpage](#). To add your municipality to the list, please fill out the [Water Use Restrictions Reporting Form](#). The public and the media are driven to this webpage during drought; therefore, this is an effective tool for spreading the message about water restrictions. If you have questions, please email [waterconservation@des.nh.gov](mailto:waterconservation@des.nh.gov).

**Providing Emergency Water Supplies to the Public**

Municipalities may provide access to an emergency water supply for residents whose wells have been impacted by drought. Where possible, municipalities should designate a local source of water that is already associated with a state-regulated public water system to ensure the water has been tested and is safe. If a source of drinking water is made available to the public that is not associated with a public water system, please contact Steve Roy by phone at [\(603\) 271-3918](tel:6032713918) or via email at [stephen.roy@des.nh.gov](mailto:stephen.roy@des.nh.gov) to request well testing assistance.

Fire departments may deliver drinking water to area farms to provide water for livestock or to irrigate crops. These efforts are critical to area farmers who are struggling to grow food for and provide water to their livestock. Fire departments should not use their tanks to fill wells, nor should water from fire department tanks be used for human drinking and cooking. This activity could result in contamination of groundwater and cause people consuming the water to become sick.

Please provide the location of emergency supplies to NHDES via email at [waterconservation@des.nh.gov](mailto:waterconservation@des.nh.gov). A list will be maintained on the [NHDES Drought Management webpage](#).

#### **Private Well Owner Financial Assistance**

Low-income private well owners having water supply issues with their well can be directed to the [Residential Well Financial Assistance Program](#) offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development.

#### **Water Withdrawals from Surface Waters**

During a drought, municipalities and NHDES often receive calls from concerned citizen related to observing water users, such as water tanker trucks, withdrawing water from surface waters. To help address these questions, see the NHDES fact sheet, [DWGB-1-17 Intermittent Water Withdrawals from Surface Waters](#). In summary, the activity is legal if certain conditions are followed, including receiving approval from the property owner of the frontage from which the withdrawal occurs. Often, this is a town road, which is owned by the municipality.

#### **Message to Provide to the Public**

The [NHDES Drought Management webpage](#) includes the status of current drought conditions; water conservation references; and guidance documents for the public, homeowners on private wells, and public water systems.

#### **State Emergency Contacts**

Please direct questions and concerns to the appropriate contact on the [Drought Contact List](#).

Revised: June 2022