



## The 2018 Drought

2018 has been an extremely hot and dry year globally. Around the world there have been deadly heatwaves, wildfires, and severe water shortages. In the UK, rivers have dried up, moorlands and forests have burned, and reservoirs and lakes have filled with toxic algal blooms. The parched, yellowing landscape has revealed traces of rare and exciting archaeological finds, but farmers have struggled to feed their livestock and irrigate their crops. Meanwhile many of us have basked in the sun, flocked to beaches, and had plenty of extra baths and showers. We've taken note of reminders to stay hydrated and always had access to drinking water. We've washed the dust off our cars and filled up our paddling pools, ponds and water features. All the time we have been aware that we are being asked to "Be Water Wise" and to "do our bit" to save water. But what does it really mean to be water wise?



Throughout the hot weather, water companies have struggled to treat supplies fast enough to meet customer demand. In the first year of a drought there is often enough stored water available but we do not have the facilities to treat higher volumes when demand rises above the normal range. To resolve this issue, banning the use of hosepipes, which can distribute between 500 and 1,000 litres of water an hour, has been the traditional method used to bring demand down to manageable levels. However, in this era of devices and screens, even hosepipe bans may not be enough. Recently, survey respondents have reported spending up to 45 minutes in the shower instead of the recommended two to three. One of their favourite pursuits is apparently watching Netflix through a

Perspex shower curtain. Trends like these have the potential to drain reservoirs quickly and the results could be catastrophic in a drought year.

### Your Challenge



**WATER WATCH**

*Update* 

**RESERVOIR STOCKS**

TODAY - 13.5 per cent  
YESTERDAY - 13.8 per cent  
SUNDAY - 13.8 per cent

**RAINFALL AT WALSHAW DEAN**

TODAY - 0.5 mm  
NOV TOTAL - 53.4 mm  
NOVEMBER AVE - 138mm

**DEMAND (24 hours to 09.00hrs)**

TODAY - 53.2 thousand cubic metres  
YESTERDAY - 52.9 thousand cubic metres.

... will rise again

The UK Drought and Water Scarcity Programme would like you to change the way we talk about droughts and water shortages. We want you to create a campaign to shake up perceptions and shift water habits. You can choose to design for a socially and/or geographically targeted social media campaign, or more traditional forms of communication, or a full-blown national campaign spanning multiple platforms. We want you to make water saving cool and trendy and we want everyone to understand why it is time for a change of dialogue. We'd like you to try to steer the public debate away from criticism of water providers to a position of understanding and a common-sense approach to flexible water use that responds to the weather in the opposite way to the present. When it is hot and dry we want water use to go down and not up. To achieve this you are going to have to turn the whole issue of droughts and water scarcity on its head.

## Where would we be without water?



We could not survive without it for very long. Every one of us uses between 130 and 160 litres a day. It is a common misconception that water is an infinite resource. It is in fact a finite resource that cycles through lands, rivers, oceans, and the atmosphere. In a drought year, the normal water cycle is disrupted. Long periods of dry weather are interrupted by sporadic heavy rainfall events and thunderstorms. The rain runs straight off the hard-baked land, into the sea. There are few opportunities to harvest this water and instead we have to rely on dwindling reserves.

Over half the water companies in the UK are classified as being in areas of serious water stress, where in dry years, demand is increasingly likely to outstrip supply. If the drought continues through winter and into a second year, even if we increase capacity to treat water, there will not be enough in reserve to provide for everything that we want. We have to focus instead on only using water

when we really do need it. Our water use habits may have to change. This might mean that businesses will keep on drawing water as usual but householders may be asked to reduce their daily consumption by at least one third.

There have been great advances in water technology in recent years. Most households have water saving devices such as low-flush toilets and aerating taps and showers. Water companies have a duty to continually promote water saving, whatever the weather. Research conducted during the drought that lasted between 2010 and 2012 showed that our water habits are governed by some specific personally held beliefs. These beliefs enable us to set parameters around our water use that conflict with water saving initiatives, and are underpinned by an unwavering core belief in the constant availability of water, that runs counter to our stated intentions to be water wise. Though we are able to list common water saving activities such as not leaving the taps running, when we choose to we subconsciously fall into a state described as 'Expediency Amnesia' in other words, we temporarily stop saving water, to meet our desires for convenience, pleasure, or aesthetic preference. When water is rationed where we live, we often go to the gym to shower or to a friend or relative who lives in an un-rationed area, for a bath. We take our laundry to a laundrette. This doesn't save any water, it just moves water demand to businesses or location that is not affected by rationing.

## How do we talk about drought?



When water is scarce, the media has plenty to say about it. Campaign advertisements become regular features in newspapers. There is plenty of editorial covering common themes such as dry gardening, hosepipe bans, the pay packets of water company executives, and speculation on when it might rain.

Researchers at the University of Lancaster have analysed historic editions of national broadsheet and tabloid newspapers dating back as far as the mid 1800s. They have looked at the way past droughts and water shortages have been reported and the words that have been used. The word drought features frequently in conversations about football (goal droughts) and lack of rainfall in third world countries (famines). When it comes to reflecting on UK water resources, analysis shows that, as society has evolved from a mainly agrarian one to an industrial and latterly city-centric one, the drought dialogue has evolved alongside. Where we once would have mainly talked about water famines and crop and livestock losses, though we still talk about pressure on the farming community, we are now more likely to talk about which drought tolerant ornamental plants to grow in our gardens, how hosepipe bans might affect our activities, and installing water butts to collect water when it rains. Commonly droughts are described as 'prolonged' periods of dry weather. Hosepipe bans 'loom' and eventually are 'imposed' upon us. Changes in climate and the weather are highlighted as the causes, and water companies are criticised for allowing water to seep away from

ageing, leaky infrastructure before it ever reaches their customers. Water saving hints and tips abound. We want you to avoid falling into this type of discourse and to focus on the common sense approach to using less water when the weather is generally drier than normal. The primary goal is to find a way of triggering subtle adjustments in society that collectively result in big water savings, without courting controversy or criticism of water providers. We want people to fine-tune their water habits and be proud of their ability to bend with natural forces.

No one wants to admit that they waste water. Even when there isn't a drought.

No one sets out to deliberately waste water. They just use what they feel they need to, even if with a little more care and attention they could actually use a lot less. This means that everyone thinks that they are Water Wise. We want you to find a new drought narrative that helps people to understand that water is a limited resource that we all share with nature. It is a universal commons that we have to treat with respect and care. Though water companies collect it, treat it, and deliver it, we cannot take it for granted.