

West Midlands Area

Prolonged Dry Weather

The Situation

There are four stages to describe and manage our dry weather response – prolonged dry weather, drought, severe drought and recovering from drought. The Environment Agency's West Midlands area has moved from Normal to Prolonged Dry Weather status. We will review this status should we see significant change.

Despite recent rainfall in the West and Midlands this has not been enough to compensate for the recent heatwaves and dry weather. This is a strategic move to prioritise our response to increasingly challenging conditions. By thinking big and taking early action, we aim to prepare for potential escalation of these conditions as we progress through the remainder of the summer season.

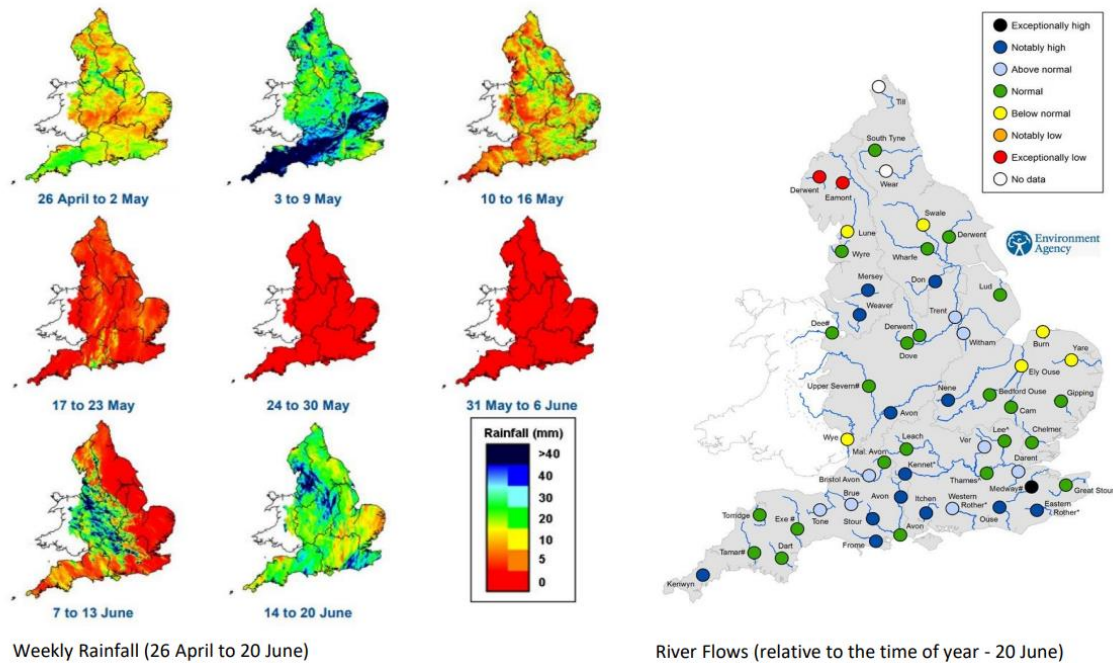
What does 'Prolonged Dry Weather' mean for the West Midlands?

West Midlands catchments respond very quickly to hot and dry conditions. Below average rainfall in May and June and high temperatures resulted in low river flows, low groundwater levels and declining levels in our natural lakes. These hydrological indicators have put pressure on the natural environment and the people whose businesses rely on water. Climate change means we are getting hotter and drier weather more often and we will see incidents of low river flows and low groundwater levels more frequently.



The decision to change status for West Midlands is based on these indicators and emerging concerns for the environment, protected sites, tourism, land management, agriculture, and abstractors. June 2023 was the UK's hottest June on record, beating the previous record set in 1940, as well as June 1976 (part of the well-known drought of 1976). A key factor in the environmental impacts observed was the sustained heat rather than short peaks.

The Met Office forecast for the next few days shows an unsettled picture with temperatures closer to average. The long-range forecast from the Met Office is for an increased likelihood of heatwaves and heat related impacts, this comes with an increased likelihood of thundery downpours.



The Environment Agency's role

The Environment Agency is responsible for safeguarding water resources in England and protecting the environment. Water is essential for human health and wellbeing, for our economy, including the production of food. Our role is to monitor, report and act to reduce the impact of prolonged dry weather on the people, business, economic growth, the natural environment, and water users.

What action are we taking?

Increased monitoring

We continue to closely monitor river and groundwater levels, soil moisture deficit and regulate all abstractors including water companies.

We have increased monitoring of river levels, flows and groundwater depth, to ensure the correct regulatory decisions are made.

Water quality logging devices are out in our main rivers (Severn, Wye, Teme, Avon and Trent) measuring temperature and dissolved oxygen levels. These help us to identify potential impacts on fish populations. Our fisheries teams have already carried out fish rescues in River Redlake and the River Teme, and we continue to monitor the impacts from low flows.

We have additional monitoring for algal blooms on the River Wye and River Lugg. Our Hydrology, Groundwater, Integrated Environment Planning and Land and Water teams are taking appropriate, co-ordinated action in a timely manner to respond to the current situation. Our proactive actions aim to meet the water needs of users while prioritising environmental preservation. We also maintain ongoing communication and provide updates to key stakeholders at various levels.

Increased regulation

We are working closely with our local water companies to manage water resources and to ensure they follow their statutory drought plans.

We are advising all abstractors to act now and use water responsibly. We have issued abstraction licence restrictions across the West Midlands to control usage and preserve water. We continue to monitor the situation closely and will increase the number of licence restrictions if required. We have commenced targeted irrigation patrols in restricted areas to check / enforce licence compliance and offer advice.

Supporting river flows and transfers of water

The River Severn is a unique system that it is highly regulated to maintain the balance between people and the environment. This means it requires some degree of water resource support most years, known as River Severn Regulation.

To protect the river and the estuary from damage resulting from low flows we have been supplementing the flows through River Severn Regulation continuously since 29 May. Water has been released from Clywedog Reservoir and Lake Vyrnwy in Wales and the Shropshire Groundwater Scheme in England was switched on for additional support from 29 June. Severn regulation supplies of water are not infinite. We have a detailed drought plan that specifies the actions we need to take should supplies get to a level where we are concerned and need to take action to prolong remaining sources, we are monitoring the situation closely.

Across the West Midlands including Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Worcester, Gloucester and across South Staffordshire, more than 6 million people are supplied by water abstracted from the River Severn and supported by River Severn Regulation.

How are we supporting farmers?

The Environment Agency is working closely with the National Farmers Union to understand any potential pressures if the dry weather continues and will provide advice and guidance throughout the growing season.

We are considering how we can be flexible to support requests from farmers should the hot, dry weather continue.

We encourage farmers to understand their abstraction licences to make sure they are fit to meet their current and future water needs, and to apply to vary those licences if necessary.

How can you help?

The water we use comes from our natural environment. We should all try to use less water at times of water scarcity to protect this precious resource and those people who rely on water for their businesses, for recreation and health and wellbeing. We can all do our part to use water wisely and manage this

precious resource, and there are useful water saving tips for us all at <https://www.waterwise.org.uk/save-water/>

If you are out and about and see signs of environmental stress, please report incidents to our hotline **0800 80 70 60**. It's free and open 24 hours a day.

Incidents you should report if you see them include:

- fish in distress
- collapsed or badly damaged riverbanks and beds
- unusual drops in river flow
- people taking water illegally from rivers, streams, canals or underground sources such as wells

More information on other incidents we would like to know about and how to report can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident>

If you have any questions or queries you can call our National Customer Contact Centre for advice on 03708 506 506.

You can find further information in our GOV.UK blog on drought [Drought and Water Resource Information and Links - Creating a better place \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

We will send dry weather update reporting when there is a change in status.