

Drought is Natural

Drought is a regular event in New Mexico. It visits the state in recurring cycles. A major drought occurred in the 1950s, again in the 1970s, and, most recently, in the latter part of the 1990s.

In the past, the state has been able to weather droughts in spite of our normally limited water supplies.

However, things have changed now. With the increase in population during the last decade, our water supplies are less able to stretch to the point of meeting our water demands during such a crisis. Communities need to plan ahead and be better prepared to face the adversity of decreased water supplies caused by drought.

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**How Communities Can
Prepare for and Cope with Drought**

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To better meet their drinking water needs, communities can initiate certain actions and take advantage of assistance offered by New Mexico state government agencies. Here's how.

1 Prepare water conservation and drought contingency plans.

Using water wisely is important at any time in our state; however, water conservation becomes even more critical during a drought. Communities should prepare both long-term and short-term water conservation plans. For information and technical assistance on how to do this, contact the Office of the State Engineer at 1-800-WATER-NM.

2 Make residents aware of the need to conserve water.

Increasing community awareness about drought is critical to reducing water use during this crisis. Residents need to know what the water situation is, why they should conserve water, and how to conserve. The Office of the State Engineer makes available a number of water conservation brochures which can be used by communities to distribute to water users. Call 1-800-WATER-NM to order these free materials.

3 Maintain water systems to stay in good condition and operate efficiently.

A water system that remains in good shape and runs efficiently can better serve the high water demands of a drought. Communities should meter water pumped and used, and establish a leak detection and repair program. To help address such infrastructure needs, technical assistance is available from the following sources:

- Drinking Water Bureau, New Mexico Environment Department, 1-877-654-8720
- New Mexico Rural Water Association, 1-800-819-9893 or www.nmrwa.org

4 Obtain financial assistance as needed to maintain the system.

There are at least three sources of financial assistance to help communities improve their water supply, treatment and delivery facilities to address drought impacts.

- Board of Finance Division, New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration, 505-827-4980
- New Mexico Finance Authority, 505-984-1454
- Rural Infrastructure Program, Construction Programs Bureau, New Mexico Environment Department, 505-827-2797

5 Keep up to date on drought conditions.

For information on drought conditions, weather forecasts and sources of assistance, visit the web sites of the New Mexico Drought Task Force at <http://weather.nmsu.edu/drought> and <http://enso.uno.edu.ndmc>.

6 Prepare an emergency water right application.

If supplies get dangerously short during a drought, a community may file an emergency water right application with the Office of the State Engineer to drill and use a supplemental or replacement well if certain requirements are met. Contact the office located nearest you in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Roswell, Deming and Aztec.

7 Request emergency water supplies.

If a community has difficulty meeting water demands and faces the danger of running out of adequate drinking water, the New Mexico National Guard can haul potable water to the community for a limited time. Tanker trucks supply the water, and residents must bring their own water containers directly to the truck. To use this service, contact the New Mexico Emergency Management Center at 505-476-9611.

8 Make residents aware of mental health impacts and assistance.

Droughts can cause significant mental health impacts on residents, especially in rural communities that depend upon farming and ranching as a basis of economic support. Be aware that the risk of stress, depression and suicide tend to increase during such situations, as does alcohol and substance abuse. Publicize sources of assistance that are available. Some of these sources are:

- Yellow Pages of the telephone book under "Mental Health Services"
- Crisis Response of Santa Fe, 1-888-920-6333 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
- American Indian/Alaskan Native Community Suicide Prevention Center & Network, 1-800-942-7440