

NEWS RELEASE

Officials extend regional Drought Watch for DC region

Council of Governments, area utilities encourage wise water use, fire safety

Washington, D.C. (November 6, 2024) – Metropolitan Washington remains under a Drought Watch, following several months of low rainfall with dry conditions expected to continue throughout the fall and winter months. The Drought Watch was enacted in July by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). Area city and county managers were advised today that officials on COG's Drought Coordination Technical Committee met last week and recommended keeping the region under the Drought Watch.

Residents and businesses in the metropolitan Washington region are being asked to take voluntary measures to conserve water and help reduce demand on the region's water supply systems. The regional Drought Watch applies to nearly six million residents across metropolitan Washington.

The current Drought Watch, now in its fourth month, is the first time since 2010 that COG has declared a Drought Watch. The Watch enacted in 2010 lasted just under a month.

Following the [regional Drought Response Plan](#), officials emphasized there is currently an adequate supply of water in the Potomac River and back-up reservoirs. They ask residents to implement voluntary water conservation practices across the region to reduce water demand and meet environmental needs of the river. A Drought Watch is the level in the plan before Drought Warning, when additional water restrictions are requested and could become mandatory should conditions worsen. The region has never declared a Drought Warning.

Fire safety and protection are concerns due to dry conditions. The region is in the fall fire season, with an increased risk for wildfires. The State of Maryland implemented a statewide ban on open air burning effective November 1st. The entire State of Delaware and several Pennsylvania counties have implemented similar restrictions. Committee members encourage residents to use extra caution when smoking outside, using outdoor grills, or engaging in other activities that involve flammable materials. [Check current fire weather conditions](#) provided by the National Weather Service.

Here are simple tips residents can use to limit indoor and outdoor water use:

- Monitor watering lawns, plants and shrubs;
- Sweep sidewalks and driveways (instead of using a hose);
- Avoid washing your car, or instead use a commercial car wash that recycles water;
- Fix any plumbing leaks – especially toilets and faucets;
- Reduce shower length to under 5 minutes;
- Turn off water while brushing your teeth; and
- Wash full loads of dishes and clothes.

The flow in the Potomac River is low but fortunately, due to sound planning by area water utilities and local governments, most of the area is well prepared to withstand drought. Three water supply reservoirs were constructed in the early 1980s to provide water during droughts. These reservoirs are nearly full and, if needed, water can be released to supplement the flow in the river. Water

monitoring experts continue to closely gauge flows in the Potomac River and watch weather forecasts to determine if and when releases are necessary.

A detailed list of tips for wise water use can be found at mwcog.org/wisewater.

Background Information

Over the past several months, the region has experienced record-breaking high temperatures along with some periods of historically low streamflow and groundwater levels. NOAA's Climate Prediction Center has declared that nearly all of the Potomac River Basin is experiencing varying levels of drought and precipitation levels have dropped nearly 3 inches below normal in the past 30 days.

MORE: [Current drought conditions in the region and other resources](#)

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The Council of Governments is an independent, nonprofit association where area leaders address regional issues affecting the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia.