

Town Of Vernon

Drought Communications Plan



Annex to the Local Emergency Operations Plan

Adopted - April, 2019

Introduction

Vernon property owners receive their water through private wells and water provided by the Connecticut Water Company. The Town's communication policy regarding water levels and drought conditions is guided by best practices for private well users and guidelines provided by the CT Water Company. The Vernon Drought Communications Policy is designed to keep the community apprised of low water levels and drought conditions, and to educate property owners on water conservation best practices.

Drought Definition

Drought is defined as a period of dryness, especially when prolonged, resulting in a shortage of water and damage to crops. Drought is typically the result of abnormally low rainfall and can prevent the successful growth of vegetation. ¹

Objectives

1. Maintain effective and timely communications with the Vernon community as it pertains to water supply and drought conditions, including both voluntary and mandatory restrictions.
2. Ensure local residents and businesses are informed of low water volumes and drought conditions in the local drinking water bodies.
3. Promote and advocate water conservation activities among Vernon property owners.
4. Leverage effective platforms to relay water supply levels, drought conditions, water conservation resources, and Town water conservation efforts to the public.

Process and Players

Public drinking water sources in Vernon are managed by the CT Water Company who evaluates and reports on their respective water volume and conditions on an ongoing basis. When water levels are low, the water company relays the information to the CT Department of Public Health (DPH) and the local governments. The following information outlines the CT Water Company's Stages and procedure during drought conditions.

¹ Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/drought>

CT Water Company – Drought Stages and Response Actions

Stage I – Drought Advisory

Response Actions:

- Contact local and state agencies, including the DPH, concerning the initiation of a Drought Advisory.
- Develop media messages for customers summarizing the situation. Customers will be cautioned to avoid wasting water and advised on sprinkling wisely.
- Voluntary conservation will be promoted in residential, commercial and industrial facilities to reduce demand from previous non-drought projected usage for the appropriate month.

Stage II – Drought Watch

Response Actions:

- Contact local and state agencies, including the DPH, concerning the initiation of a Drought Watch.
- The media will be contacted to promote voluntary conservation in residential, commercial and industrial facilities to reduce demand from previous non-drought projected usage for the appropriate month. Messages will be prepared for distribution to customers appealing for stringent voluntary conservation measures. Preparation for mandatory conservation, including necessary enforcement mechanisms, will be initiated.

Stage III – Drought Warning

Response Actions:

- Contact local and state agencies, including the DPH, concerning initiation of the drought warning plan. This is the first phase of mandatory conservation. At this level, the Company will ban all unnecessary water usage. No outside hose usage will be allowed, nor are in-ground sprinkler systems to be used.
- The media and all customers will be notified on the implementation of the first phase of mandatory conservation.
- A plan will be formulated in concert with state and local officials for rationing of water if a drought emergency should be reached. The needs of high priority customers, homes, commerce and fire protection will be established and prioritized. Plans will be made for emergency service of drinking and cooking water by tanker to any areas where normal water service must be terminated.
- Coordination with local officials concerning alternative facilities for obtaining water will be initiated, as required.

Stage IV – Drought Emergency

Response Actions:

- The pre-arranged drought hazard rationing plan described above will be initiated in cooperation with appropriate local and state officials, including the DPH. The details of the rationing program will depend upon the nature of the individual emergency but will provide for the bare essentials of life sustenance for as long as possible. The plan will consider needs of high priority customers, homes, commerce and fire protection. Non-essential commercial and industrial use would be cut off in accordance with the established priorities. It may be necessary to set a storage minimum to be held for extinguishing fires, the amount needed depending upon the nature of the emergency and structures in the service area. Provision for emergency services for bathing will be coordinated with local officials, and arrangements will be instituted for emergency service of drinking and cooking water by tanker to any areas where normal water service must be cut off. Mandatory rationing of water will be strictly enforced.

Recovery from Emergency Conditions - As recovery from the emergency conditions is achieved, the level of emergency measures will descend as the appropriate trigger levels are met in the reverse order.

Communications Platforms

- Town website – homepage
- Local Media Outlets – The Journal
- Mailers and Public Reports
- Direct mailers (drought conditions only) – For use in emergency situations only

Municipal Water Conservation Practices

The Vernon Parks & Recreation Department has developed a Responsible Irrigation Policy that is used on several public parks, green spaces and competition-level athletic fields in Town Of Vernon. This policy describes the procedures and information used for programmable irrigation systems that are programmed to conserve the natural water resources for these various parks, fields, and green spaces.

Subsequently, these irrigations systems may be completely turned off during drought conditions, if required by the Town Of Vernon Administration Office.