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Subject: Despite Rain and Snow, Dry Conditions Continue Throughout Vermont

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Despite Rain and Snow, Dry Conditions Continue Throughout Vermont

MONTPELIER — Despite rain and snow this past weekend, state officials want Vermonters to be mindful of water use and to take steps to conserve water when possible. Abnormally dry conditions this spring and summer have taken a toll on water levels, and may impact drinking water supplies through fall and into the winter.

Low rainfall, combined with last years' low snowpack and abnormally low spring runoff, has created ripe conditions for mild to moderate drought impacts around the state. National Weather Service data from April to October show that most of Vermont is experiencing a total rainfall deficit of about four to eight inches below average. In areas of the southern Connecticut River Valley, and in Grand Isle and Chittenden Counties, the deficit is as high as twelve inches.

“The precipitation this weekend may have provided some temporary short-term relief, but it’s not enough,” said Scott Whittier, Burlington-based meteorologist with the National Weather Service. “We need several of these systems to come through to ‘recharge’ the groundwater supplies before the ground freezes in winter.”

State agencies were notified last week of several situations where homeowners, farms, or town water districts were struggling with insufficient water supplies. A State Drought Task Force made up of representatives from several state and federal agencies has convened to coordinate information and response to emerging drought issues.

The task force has launched a crowd-sourced drought map to begin collecting data on where water supply shortages are occurring. Vermonters are being asked to report their low or dry drinking water wells [using this online tool](#) so areas of concern can be identified and assistance coordinated, if necessary. The task force is also issuing water conservation guidance for all citizens.

“Drought can become very widespread across a region or appear in very localized pockets,” said State Climatologist Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux, a professor at the University of Vermont and member of the task force. “It is difficult to predict. We can be in an extended drought situation, or go from a drought to flood conditions in a very short space of time. That’s why it’s so important for people to have a conservation mindset as winter nears.”

Vermonters are encouraged to take these simple steps to reduce water consumption at home:

- Repair leaking faucets, pipes, toilets, or other fixtures as soon as possible.
- Run the dishwasher or laundry machine only with full loads.
- Keep a pitcher of water in the fridge for cold drinking water to avoid needing to run the tap.
- Avoid washing your car.
- Consider installing simple, cost-effective tools that decrease household water consumption. Aerators for kitchen sink faucets only cost several dollars and are simple to install, and water efficient showerheads can make a drastic difference in water consumption. Contact your local hardware store for availability.

If your drinking water well runs low or dry:

- Report your issue to the Drought Task Force [using an online form](#).
- DO NOT use a tanker or fire truck to refill your drinking water well. It is an inefficient use of water and could contaminate your drinking water system.
- Conserving water will help prevent your well from running dry.

Drinking water wells that run low or dry can lead to a risk of illness. Drought does not generally affect the quality of the groundwater itself, but if a well runs dry and loses pressure, it may draw in contaminated water from nearby sources such as a septic system, or through small leaks in the system.

If you notice sediment or a change in the taste or color of your water, it may be a sign that your water supply is running low. To evaluate possible health risks, test your drinking water for bacteria. To order a drinking water test kit call 800-660-9997, or visit http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/ph_lab/water_test.aspx

For more drought information and water conservation tips, visit http://anr.vermont.gov/about_us/special-topics/drought or call the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division at 802-828-1535.

For private drinking water well and other safe drinking water resources and information, visit http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/water/safe_water.aspx.

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