



How Public Water Utilities Can Report Water Shortages

Preface

This guidance document is intended to assist wholesale and retail public utilities in assessing the amount of raw water remaining for treatment, and reporting when the utility is reasonably certain that the available water supply is less than 180 days. The regulations appear in the Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 290 and 291 (30 TAC 290 and 291) and include:

- 30 TAC 290.41(b), Water Quantity
- 30 TAC 291, Subchapter M, Water Shortage Report, Section 200

This regulatory guide does not take the place of the full, official TCEQ rules. It is intended only as a general explanation about selected parts of 30 TAC Chapter 290 and 291 (and other referenced TCEQ rules and Texas statutes). If you have questions about any information in this document, contact the TCEQ's Public Drinking Water Section at 512-239-4691.

Introduction

Texas periodically suffers from persistent drought, decreasing the available water supply. Whether your utility uses groundwater or surface water, it is important to accurately assess the amount of water remaining to prepare to meet current and future demands.

Reporting a Water Shortage

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has developed an online form to facilitate reporting of water-use restrictions consistent with a utility's drought contingency plan. In addition, the form allows the utility to report the amount of water remaining before an outage could occur. The form can be accessed at <www.droughtreport.org>.

The TCEQ prefers that you report a water shortage using this online form. If a utility is unable to access the online form, it can file the report by e-mail, regular mail, or fax.

For help with reporting a water shortage, please contact the TCEQ Small Business and Environmental Assistance Division's drought hotline at

800-447-2827 from 8 a.m. to 12 noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Public water systems that report having less than a 180-day supply of water remaining will be contacted by the TCEQ to discuss their water shortage.

Determining the Amount of Water Remaining

The TCEQ understands it may be difficult for utilities to measure their water supply in order to calculate the amount of water remaining. To determine a projected out-of-water date, it is necessary to measure all sources available to the water system. If a water system uses groundwater, measuring the water level in all wells may be necessary to determine and track the amount of available water above the well pumps, and to determine the water supply's rate of decline. Public water systems utilizing surface water may find it necessary to measure water levels in their reservoirs and above their surface water intakes, in order to track the available water accessible to their intakes and to determine the rate of decline of available water. Surface water systems obtaining water from rivers or streams may need to measure stream flow. In determining a projected outage date, it is also essential to identify all emergency sources (e.g., emergency wells, emergency interconnections with nearby water systems, emergency surface water reservoirs, etc.) and the feasibility of making these sources operational. Emergency sources must be authorized or permitted for use by the TCEQ and any other relevant authorities (e.g., groundwater-conservation districts). The TCEQ has developed a publication (RG-501B) that can help with measuring your water level—*Managing Small Public Water Systems: Source Assessment and Planning* is available online at <www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rg-501b> or by calling the Small Business and Environmental Assistance drought hotline at 800-447-2827.

When determining a projected water-outage date, it is important to factor in weather, specifically rainfall and evaporation rates (for systems using a surface water supply). The TCEQ understands it is complicated to predict weather, so we ask that utilities plan for little to no rainfall and high evaporation rates.

When to Report

A retail public utility must report to the TCEQ when its personnel are reasonably certain it has less than 180 days of water supply remaining as required by the Texas Water Code §13.148. A public water system must also notify the TCEQ when it implements mandatory stages of their drought contingency plan [30 TAC 288.20(b)]. Systems can also report any mechanical problems, or if drought has increased or decreased in severity.

Completing the Online Drought Reporting Form

The PWS Drought Contingency Plan Reporting Form is available online at <www.droughtreport.org>.

To complete the form correctly, every box must have an answer or “NA” (for ‘not applicable’).

Steps to filling out the form:

1. **Today’s Date:** Enter the date for the day the form is being filled out. This is important because many PWSs have or will have multiple report entries.
2. **PWS ID#:** Enter the PWS ID number, the unique seven-digit number assigned to each PWS in the state of Texas. If you are unsure of your number, you can find it by going to Texas Drinking Water Watch <dww.tceq.state.tx.us/DWW/> and searching by your PWS name (for a municipality, its PWS name is typically the city name). The PWS ID is listed under “Water System No.” next to your PWS name. If you find your PWS ID using this method, please do not include the “TX” that precedes the ID number on the reporting form.
3. Enter the **System Name** and **County**.
4. **PWS Contact, Number, E-Mail:** Enter the name and contact information for the best person to contact for information about the water system for additional drought information. This may not be the person filling out the form.
5. Enter the system’s **Water Source**. If groundwater, note the number of wells, including emergency or seasonal wells, as well as the aquifer. If surface water, include the name of the river, lake, or reservoir, and any permanent interconnections with other systems.
6. **Outdoor Water Restrictions:** Use the drop-down menu to choose the option that best correlates to your system’s current water restrictions. This restriction stage may differ from your system’s drought contingency plan stage number. *V* = voluntary watering schedule; *1* = mandatory watering schedule; *2* = no outside watering, limited hand-held hose use only; *3* = no outside water use; *NA* = not applicable—you are not currently implementing your drought contingency plan.
7. **Level of Concern:** Also known as the *priority*, this is an indication of the estimated amount of water remaining before an outage could occur due to depleted supply. Choose the most applicable option from the drop-down menu: *W* = watch (the system currently has more than a 180-day supply of water remaining); *C* = concern (a 180-day supply or less); *P* = priority (a 90-day supply or less); *E* = emergency (a 45-day supply or less); *O* = outage (the system is currently experiencing a water outage);

R = resolved (all drought-related issues have been resolved). If you report that your system has less than a 180-day supply of water, the TCEQ will contact you for additional information.

8. **Problem:** Please report your drought-related problem or mechanical issue in detail. For example, the aquifer, river, or lake levels are low or there is high usage with no rain **or** your well pump has failed or a line has broken. Please be specific. If your source water is low, what is the name of the aquifer or surface water source? If you are reporting because the system has changed water-use-restriction stages, please indicate why the system is changing stages.
9. **Remedial Options:** How is the problem being handled? What steps is the system taking? If you are having a mechanical problem, how are you fixing it and how long will the fix take? If you are having drought issues, please describe your water-use restrictions. What practices have you put into place to conserve water? Have you restricted water use? Is it voluntary or mandatory? Have you limited outside watering to a certain number of days per week? Is it limited to times of the day or based on street address (or both)? Are you only allowing hand watering? Again, please be as detailed as possible.
10. **What is the minimal amount your system/customers need for basic functions?:** Please answer in millions of gallons per day. If you don't know, please type "unknown". Note that 500,000 gallons per day is equal to 0.500 (mgd).
11. **Do you have a water supply contract?:** If yes, please list with whom you have the contract and whether it is for raw or potable water.
12. In the event that it's needed, **Do you have an alternate source of water?** If the answer is "yes," then please state the source.
13. **Your Name:** Please give the first and last name of the person filling out the report.
14. **Your Number:** please give a phone number for the person filling out the report.

If you don't have reliable Internet access, you need help completing the form, or if you have questions, please call our Small Business and Local Government Assistance hotline at 800-447-2827.

Public Information

Drought reporting is public information once received by the TCEQ and is posted online weekly at <www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/pws-restrictions>.

The Emergency Drinking Water Task Force

The Texas Drought Preparedness Plan created the Emergency Drinking Water Task Force in October 2011. The main goal of the task force is to help public water systems supply adequate water for drinking and sanitation to ensure public health and safety. The participating agencies are the TCEQ, the Texas Division of Emergency Management, the Texas Water Development Board, and the Texas Department of Agriculture. On occasion, the task force also relies on other state and federal agencies for expedited project reviews and technical assistance. The task force assists public water systems that have self-reported to the TCEQ that they may have less than a 180-day supply of water remaining due to persistent drought.

Mitigating a Water Shortage

There are various options for mitigating a water shortage, including extending current water supplies (such as extending a surface water intake to deeper waters or lowering an existing well pump) or implementing mandatory provisions of the utility's drought contingency plan. Restricting non-essential water use, such as landscape irrigation, can be an effective tool in extending existing water supplies until an alternate source can be secured, if necessary.

Another potential option is to secure an alternate source of water such as drilling wells, interconnecting with an adjacent public water system or as a last resort, hauling potable water from an approved source. Please note that you must use a TCEQ-approved water source and hauler.

Funding for Water-Related Projects

The Texas Water Infrastructure Coordination Committee helps utilities to obtain funding for water- and wastewater-related projects. The organization consists of technical assistance providers and authorities that provide grants and loans. For additional information, please visit <www.twicc.org>.