

Water Resources Update – February 2012

Following our letters about the water resources situation in our region, I am sending an update following a further dry month in January.

We will email these monthly updates in future as we hope this will be easier for you than receiving a letter each time.

Winter has arrived, but unfortunately the recent snow and the freezing temperatures are not really helping to refill the Sussex reservoirs in time for the expected Spring and Summer demand.

January saw around 50% of the long term average rainfall that you would expect to see in the month. This has seen the refilling of Ardingly, in West Sussex, which picked up in December, slow down, and the reservoir is now standing at around 42% full.

Arlington Reservoir near Eastbourne is faring better, and is now at about 75%. That's because there have been high flows of water in the adjacent River Cuckmere, from which water is directly abstracted, which has helped fill the reservoir more quickly.

But the focus of the extended dry Autumn and Winter to date is not just on our reservoirs. We are concerned that the underground aquifers in Sussex and Kent are still showing no real signs of re-filling.

More than three-quarters of the region's drinking water comes from aquifers which are filled by rain which runs through porous ground such as chalk and limestone.

These natural underground water-bearing rocks act like a sponge to absorb rainwater which has percolated its way down through the soil over many weeks and months and take much longer to refill than rivers and reservoirs.

The snow which fell at the start of February will help a bit once it has thawed, but approximately one foot of snow only produces about one inch of water, so it won't make as much of an impact as you would think.

The frozen ground also makes it harder for the water to soak into the underground aquifers which also store our water.

In the absence of any prolonged periods of rainfall to bring all our water resources – both reservoirs and underground aquifers - back to normal for this time of year, we are now facing the prospect of further measures this Spring and Summer to protect public water supplies.

We cannot rule out the possibility that we may have to ask for further special powers to abstract more water than we usually do from rivers, and also restrict customers' non-essential use of water with sprinklers and hosepipes.

Following our Drought Plan we have increased efforts to find and fix leaks in the Sussex and West Kent area, are carrying out maintenance at water treatment works to ensure they work as efficiently as possible and re-routing water around our network of pipes from areas with more water available to allow the reservoirs to recover.

A radio campaign across Sussex is asking for everyone's help to reduce demand for water and we are promoting messages through our customer magazine and website as well as the media.

Our customers are continuing to play their part and we are greatly encouraged by the fantastic response we've had to our public appeals to use water wisely, and not waste it, and helping us by reporting any leaks they spot.

We are encouraging our customers to think about preparing for a dry Summer, by installing water butts to collect any rain that does fall and making sure any dripping taps are fixed.

Customers can log onto www.southeastwater.co.uk/waterefficiency for more information on water efficiency tips for the home and garden and links water saving products and discounts on water butts.

If you have any ideas for ways we can work together this Spring and Summer to reduce the impacts of any drought we would please pleased to work with you.

I hope this update has been useful but if you have any immediate concerns please do not hesitate to contact me via SEWCommunications@southeastwater.co.uk or visit www.southeastwater.co.uk/waterupdate for the latest information.

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