# England faces potential hosepipe bans amid driest spring since 1956



As England grapples with a prolonged dry spell, the spectre of hosepipe bans looms large for households across the nation. The Environment Agency has highlighted a worrying trend, noting that the period from February to April this year was the driest since 1956, with April’s rainfall plummeting to 50% below the long-term average. Although the agency has yet to formally announce a hosepipe ban, Chris Weston, chief executive of Thames Water, has indicated that restrictions may be necessary this summer to conserve resources, especially in light of last year's near-water crisis.

Reflecting on the lessons learned from the 2022 drought, Weston emphasised to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee that while he is "confident we won't run out of water," he is wary of potential restrictions on usage, contingent on rainfall levels over the coming months. Current data reinforces his concerns; figures from the Met Office reveal that south-east England received merely 34.9mm of rain from 1 March to 11 May, marking the fourth-lowest total since records began in 1931. Furthermore, the north-east has reported its driest conditions since 1938, underscoring the precarious situation.

A hosepipe ban, or Temporary Usage Ban, restricts the use of hoses for activities such as watering gardens or washing cars, effectively reserving essential water supplies for drinking and sanitation. Those who disobey these bans risk fines of up to £1,000. The imposition of such restrictions has a precedent, with South East Water having enacted a hosepipe ban in June 2023 due to soaring demand that surpassed even the peaks of the pandemic lockdown heatwave. Chief executive David Hinton noted that the decision was expedited by water shortages that developed more rapidly than anticipated, highlighting the scale of the issue faced by many water companies as regions across the UK struggled with low water pressure and diminishing supplies.

Historically, hosepipe bans are not new to the UK, with numerous water companies implementing similar measures during the extraordinary weather patterns of 2022, which saw widespread drought conditions. That summer, five water companies imposed bans affecting around 19 million customers amidst unprecedented heat. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has highlighted that such extreme weather events are increasingly prevalent due to climate change, raising concerns about future droughts becoming commonplace across the UK.

As the situation evolves, monitoring from the Environment Agency suggests that central and northern England are experiencing significant drops in river and reservoir levels earlier than usual, with reports of "exceptionally low" river flows across various monitoring sites. Areas like East Anglia, Devon, and Cornwall are of particular concern, having been designated in drought status as far back as the start of the year.

The implications of these water shortages extend beyond personal inconvenience. With the climate crisis intensifying, agricultural producers face challenges in maintaining their crops, which, in turn, may lead to rising food prices. Meanwhile, the public is urged to conserve water proactively, with recommendations from Thames Water encouraging shorter showers and mindful usage of taps.

In light of these emerging concerns, the public must remain vigilant and prepared for potential restrictions. The landscape of water usage in England is undoubtedly changing, affected by environmental factors and heightened demand. As the government and water companies consider strategies to mitigate these evolving challenges, the call for a sustainable approach to water management has never been more crucial.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: Sources (1), (3), (4)
* Paragraph 2: Sources (1), (6)
* Paragraph 3: Sources (1), (2), (7)
* Paragraph 4: Sources (4), (5)
* Paragraph 5: Sources (2), (6)
* Paragraph 6: Sources (1), (4), (5)
* Paragraph 7: Sources (1), (4), (6)
* Paragraph 8: Sources (1), (7)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/what-is-a-hosepipe-ban-britain-drought-summer-b2751089.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/16/south-east-water-imposes-hosepipe-ban-after-kent-and-sussex-water-shortages> - South East Water imposed a hosepipe ban in June 2023 due to water shortages in Kent and Sussex. The ban, effective from June 26, was implemented after the company provided an extra 120 million liters of water daily, yet demand in June broke records set during the Covid lockdown heatwave. The chief executive, David Hinton, stated that the situation developed more rapidly than the previous year, leading to the decision to restrict water usage to ensure adequate supply for all customers. The ban prohibits activities such as watering gardens, washing cars, and filling paddling pools. Schools in East Sussex faced closures due to water shortages, highlighting the severity of the situation. The article also mentions that other water companies, like Southern Water, were experiencing similar challenges, with some areas facing low or no water pressure. The piece concludes by noting that droughts are becoming more common and severe due to climate change, affecting regions like the Mediterranean, southern Africa, and parts of the UK.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-63049366> - Thames Water announced a temporary hosepipe ban affecting 10 million people across the south of England, expected to remain in place until the following year. The ban, effective from August 24, was implemented after reports indicated that the River Thames reached its lowest level since 2005 amid extreme weather conditions. The company stated that any rainfall in September had not compensated for 10 months of dry and record heat. The ban prohibits the use of hosepipes for activities such as watering gardens, washing cars, and filling paddling pools. Breaching the ban could result in fines up to £1,000. Similar measures were implemented by other water companies across Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Kent, and Sussex, following the driest July since 1935. The article highlights the unprecedented demand for water due to the heatwave and the challenges faced by water companies in managing resources during such extreme conditions.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/01/hosepipe-bans-almost-inevitable-driest-february-30-years/> - England experienced its driest February in 30 years, with an average of 15.3mm of rain, 23% of its average, making it the driest on record since 1993. This significant reduction in rainfall raised concerns about potential drought conditions and the likelihood of hosepipe bans and drought restrictions being implemented in the summer. The National Drought Group warned that the UK is one hot, dry spell away from returning to widespread drought conditions. East Anglia, Devon, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly remained in drought status, with others in recovery. Experts from the University of Reading's Atmospheric Observatory noted that if March remained dry, the reimposition of last summer's water restrictions would be almost inevitable. The article emphasizes the severity of the situation and the potential for continued water scarcity if dry conditions persist.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/29/southern-water-announces-hosepipe-ban-amid-uk-drought-fears> - Southern Water imposed the first hosepipe ban in mainland England for a decade, affecting almost 1 million people from August 5, 2022. The decision was made amid concerns over drought conditions, with Thames Water warning that it might follow suit if dry weather continued. The ban prohibited activities such as filling paddling pools, watering gardens, and washing cars. Thames Water suggested customers take shorter showers and turn off taps while brushing their teeth. The article highlights the unprecedented demand for water due to the heatwave and the challenges faced by water companies in managing resources during such extreme conditions. It also notes that droughts are becoming more common and severe due to climate change, affecting regions like the Mediterranean, southern Africa, and parts of the UK.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/weather-forecast-heatwave-uk-met-office-b2143660.html?page=6> - As parts of the UK faced hosepipe bans due to extreme heat, Yorkshire Water announced a ban effective August 26, 2022, affecting five million customers. The company stated that the restrictions would help sustain water supply into the following year. Other water companies, including Southern Water and South East Water, had already implemented similar bans. The article also mentions that vegetable prices were expected to rise over winter due to difficulties in growing crops during the heatwave. The piece highlights the widespread impact of the drought conditions and the measures taken by water companies to manage water resources during the extreme weather.
7. <https://news.sky.com/story/amp/hosepipe-ban-extended-to-more-of-cornwall-and-devon-as-water-levels-under-pressure-12865876> - South West Water extended its hosepipe ban to include Cornwall and parts of Devon on April 25, 2023, due to lower-than-average rainfall and reservoir levels. The ban, affecting around 390,000 homes, was set to remain in place until December but could be lifted sooner if the area received 'drought-breaking rainfall.' The article notes that Cornwall experienced its hottest year on record, contributing to the water shortages. The piece emphasizes the challenges faced by water companies in managing water resources during prolonged dry periods and the potential for continued restrictions if conditions do not improve.