# England faces escalating drought threat after driest spring in nearly 70 years



# England Faces Drought Risks Amid Driest Spring in Decades

England is bracing itself for the possibility of summer drought and hosepipe bans following the driest spring in nearly 70 years. The Environment Agency (EA) has highlighted a "medium" risk of drought due to persistently low reservoir levels and unusual dry conditions that have already begun to impact agriculture and increase wildfire incidents across the country.

According to the EA, spring 2023 recorded rainfall levels that were alarmingly low; March and April together saw only half of the expected rainfall, with April producing just a quarter of the long-term average. As of late April, reservoir levels across England stood at around 84% full, which is significantly lower than the 90% levels observed during the same period in 2022, a year marked by its own drought issues. This precarious situation is especially evident in the northern regions, where reservoir levels have reached notably low figures not seen since 1929.

Richard Thompson, the EA's deputy director of water, indicated that while recent years had been marked by significant rainfall—culminating last year in England's fourth wettest annual record—current weather patterns are posing grave concerns. He remarked that "the changing climate means we will see more summer droughts in the coming decades." Despite the immediate lack of hosepipe restrictions, the EA is preparing contingency plans to inform the public about potential water-saving measures.

While chalk groundwater levels remain relatively stable, river flows in northern and central England are below normal for this time of year. Compounding these challenges, farmers have already begun to irrigate their crops earlier than usual, causing heightened demand for water and putting additional strain on local water sources. Wildfires have been reported in several counties, including Cumbria and Derbyshire, fuelled by the dry vegetation arising from these extended dry spells.

The risk of drought is not simply a seasonal concern; it highlights longer-term issues within the UK’s water management framework. Recent analyses suggest that by 2050, the country may face a shortfall of nearly 5 billion litres of water per day unless significant improvements in storage and infrastructure are made. The National Farmers' Union has stated that the impact of these drought conditions varies significantly across different farming sectors, but watering requirements are becoming increasingly urgent in specific regions.

Experts warn that if dry weather persists into May, a second consecutive dry summer could initiate widescale restrictions. Climate and agriculture leaders have urged for proactive measures, with some regions already identified as being more vulnerable to water shortages. Recent studies have indicated that some water companies are inadequately prepared for drought conditions, necessitating an urgent review of resource management and strategic planning.

The UK's climate has exhibited extreme fluctuations in recent years, from severe droughts and heatwaves to heavy rainfall and flooding. In 2022, an unprecedented heatwave saw temperatures breach 40°C for the first time, further exacerbating the nation’s water challenges. However, the stubborn return of dry conditions in 2023 has kept concerns fresh among climate scientists and water management experts alike.

As England moves deeper into spring and towards summer, stakeholders are urged to adopt more sustainable practices. The Environment Agency has suggested that public awareness campaigns and water-saving initiatives can play an essential role in mitigating the risks associated with potential hosepipe bans and drought conditions.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2052045/english-homes-hosepipe-ban-driest-spring), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/hosepipe-ban-brewing-amid-acute-risk-of-water-shortages-warn-climate-farming-and-infrastructure-chiefs-12833497)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2052045/english-homes-hosepipe-ban-driest-spring), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/10/07/hosepipe-ban-may-introduced-companies-not-prepared-drought/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/uk-risk-summer-water-shortages-hosepipe-bans-scientists-warn), [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/01/hosepipe-bans-almost-inevitable-driest-february-30-years/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2052045/english-homes-hosepipe-ban-driest-spring), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/29/southern-water-announces-hosepipe-ban-amid-uk-drought-fears)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2052045/english-homes-hosepipe-ban-driest-spring), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/uk-risk-summer-water-shortages-hosepipe-bans-scientists-warn)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/01/hosepipe-bans-almost-inevitable-driest-february-30-years/), [[4]](https://news.sky.com/story/hosepipe-ban-brewing-amid-acute-risk-of-water-shortages-warn-climate-farming-and-infrastructure-chiefs-12833497)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2052045/english-homes-hosepipe-ban-driest-spring> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/01/uk-risk-summer-water-shortages-hosepipe-bans-scientists-warn> - Scientists warn that the UK faces a growing risk of summer water shortages and potential hosepipe bans due to inadequate water storage infrastructure. The Environment Agency predicts a shortfall of almost 5 billion liters of water per day by 2050, emphasizing the need for improved water management and infrastructure investment to prevent future shortages.
3. <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 only 15.3mm of rainfall, prompting meteorologists to predict that hosepipe bans and drought restrictions are 'almost inevitable' for the year. The National Drought Group has warned that the UK is one hot, dry spell away from widespread drought conditions, with parts of the country, including East Anglia, Devon, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly, remaining in drought status.
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/hosepipe-ban-brewing-amid-acute-risk-of-water-shortages-warn-climate-farming-and-infrastructure-chiefs-12833497> - National advisers warn of an 'acute risk of water shortages' in the UK if dry weather persists into May. Climate, farming, and infrastructure leaders highlight the potential for hosepipe bans, especially in the south and east of England, due to ongoing dry conditions and the possibility of a second consecutive dry summer.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/10/07/hosepipe-ban-may-introduced-companies-not-prepared-drought/> - The Environment Agency has indicated that hosepipe bans could be implemented during droughts because some water companies are insufficiently prepared. Four companies—Portsmouth, Bristol, Cambridge, and South Staffordshire Water—may not have adequate water supplies during droughts and need to enhance their resources and manage demand more effectively.
6. <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 nearly 1 million people starting August 5, 2022. Thames Water also warned of potential similar measures if dry conditions continued. The Met Office anticipated below-average rainfall for the rest of the summer, with July 2022 being the driest in England since 1911.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1883790/uk-water-shortages-hosepipe-ban-scientists-warning> - Scientists warn that the UK could face water shortages and potential hosepipe bans if summer conditions are dry and hot. The Environment Agency predicts a shortfall of almost 5 billion liters of water per day by 2050, emphasizing the need for improved water management and infrastructure investment to prevent future shortages.