# Blocking high pressure causes driest and sunniest spring on record in UK amid drought fears



A persistent “blocking” weather system hovering over the UK has resulted in one of the driest, warmest, and sunniest springs on record, igniting warnings about potential summer drought conditions. April 2025 not only marked the sunniest April since records began in 1910, but also followed a notably sunny March. On May 1, temperatures soared to 29.3°C at Kew Gardens in London, establishing a new record for the date.

This dry spell is raising alarm bells among meteorologists, who have noted that the UK experienced only about half of its usual rainfall for March and April. With water companies already advising customers to conserve water as reservoir levels dip, farmers are voicing concerns regarding crop yields for the year ahead. Recent data shows that parts of England and Wales have recorded their driest year since 1997, with total rainfall by mid-May down by 29% from average levels. Such drought conditions bring both immediate and long-term implications for food production, energy generation, and water availability across the region.

The causes of this unusual weather pattern can be traced back to a robust area of high pressure that is diverting the typical moist air flow from the North Atlantic. Known as a blocking system, this meteorological phenomenon tends to linger in place, resulting in prolonged periods of heat and dryness. Environmental data indicates that blocking events like this may become more frequent as climate change progresses, leading to increased risks of drought and extreme weather variations, often described as “weather whiplash.”

As the dry conditions persist, conflicts arise across various sectors. Heritage railways in the UK, including several popular tourist routes, have been forced to suspend steam locomotive operations to mitigate the fire risks associated with sparks that can ignite tinder-dry surroundings. Some railways have temporarily switched to diesel engines, a decision that disappoints enthusiasts but prioritises safety during this unexpectedly arid spring.

In addition to the visible impacts on leisure and recreation, looming water shortages are leading water companies to consider drastic measures, such as potential hosepipe bans. Thames Water's Chief Executive has cautioned that while current supplies could meet demand, restrictions might be on the table if rainfall remains scarce. The situation is exacerbated by an aging water infrastructure, with significant leakage reported and not a single new reservoir built in over 30 years.

In response to these challenges, water companies are beginning to explore innovative solutions. Southern Water, catering to millions, is contemplating importing water from Norway as a contingency plan. Though fraught with logistical and environmental challenges, such measures highlight the urgent necessity of addressing the UK’s inadequate water management strategy. Ofwat, the water regulator, has called for significant investment to upgrade infrastructure, including the construction of new reservoirs and treatment facilities, emphasising the pressing need for an efficient and sustainable approach to water use.

As the climate continues to change, experts predict a future punctuated by more frequent summer droughts. While forecasting specific atmospheric changes remains complex, there is a consensus that warmer conditions will prevail across all seasons. The intersection of human behaviour—particularly the burning of fossil fuels—and extreme weather patterns complicates our understanding of climate impacts. However, the evidence of rising temperatures and increasing drought potential serves as a wake-up call for policymakers, farmers, and citizens alike to adapt to these new realities while prioritising long-term sustainability.

The response to this weather crisis not only requires immediate action to manage water resources effectively but also a broader strategy to ensure that communities are better equipped to withstand the increasing volatility of climate change in the future.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/weather/uk-heatwave-weather-spring-forecast-b2757157.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/8e69c305-8f22-4052-817d-5397f107d8c8)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/weather/uk-heatwave-weather-spring-forecast-b2757157.html), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/7a5d7124-0fff-4916-b1ed-dafe8156ba15)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/8e69c305-8f22-4052-817d-5397f107d8c8), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/67f2383b-9bcd-4afa-a842-27bc5580ecaa)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/7a5d7124-0fff-4916-b1ed-dafe8156ba15), [[4]](https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/news/water-companies-warn-of-potential-hosepipe-bans-soon)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/67f2383b-9bcd-4afa-a842-27bc5580ecaa), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/c1b48062-0ad6-4205-a7b5-376cff7bcc35)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/c1b48062-0ad6-4205-a7b5-376cff7bcc35)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/weather/uk-heatwave-weather-spring-forecast-b2757157.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/8e69c305-8f22-4052-817d-5397f107d8c8> - England and Wales are experiencing their driest year since 1997, with only 225mm of rainfall recorded by mid-May 2025—29% below average—making it the seventh-driest year since 1931. The Environment Agency's latest report highlights significantly reduced river flows, particularly in northern regions, where six sites logged their lowest-ever April flows. The agency has issued a medium drought risk warning and anticipates potential water usage restrictions, such as hosepipe bans. Reservoirs remain around 84% full, but levels are notably low in the North East and North West, which have seen their driest start to a year since 1929. Farmers are increasingly concerned, with early irrigation underway in some areas despite good groundwater reserves. Water companies like Yorkshire Water, United Utilities, and Severn Trent are preparing for possible shortages. Thames Water's CEO affirmed that supply would continue but cautioned that usage restrictions may be necessary depending on future rainfall. The report links recent dry conditions to climate change, predicting more frequent summer droughts in the coming decades.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/7a5d7124-0fff-4916-b1ed-dafe8156ba15> - An unusually dry spring in the UK has compelled several heritage railways to suspend steam locomotive operations due to heightened fire risks. At least six tourist railways, particularly in mountainous Welsh regions, have replaced steam engines with diesel engines to avert potential blazes caused by sparks from fireboxes, a risk exacerbated by the use of more spark-prone imported coal. Among affected services is the Jacobite line in the Scottish Highlands, which now primarily uses diesel locomotives. With 2025 proving to be the driest year since 1997 and the seventh-driest on record, according to the Met Office and Financial Times analysis, the Fire Severity Index from Natural England rates much of England and Wales as having a "very high" fire risk. Operators like the Ffestiniog, Welsh Highland, and Brecon Mountain railways are investing in water-spraying trains to mitigate risks and restore steam service. Nonetheless, many lines have faced financial setbacks and diminished tourist appeal with the switch to diesel, as the steam engine experience is a key attraction. Heritage Railway Association's chief, Steve Oates, noted the preventive shift across numerous lines amidst prolonged dry conditions.
4. <https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/news/water-companies-warn-of-potential-hosepipe-bans-soon> - As the UK faces its driest spring since 1956, several water companies are warning of potential hosepipe bans due to persistently low rainfall and decreasing reservoir levels. Companies such as Northumbrian Water are considering Temporary Use Bans (TUBs), while Welsh Water reports slightly lower water levels but no immediate concerns. Conversely, water providers like Severn Trent, Anglian Water, and Thames Water remain confident that restrictions can be avoided, citing significant infrastructure investments and proactive water management. National water storage is currently at 84%, a decline from 90% in April 2022, particularly affecting northern regions. The Met Office forecasts average rainfall and possibly higher temperatures from May to July. Despite the varied outlooks, all water companies are urging customers to conserve water and avoid waste. Water UK offers advice on efficient water usage which can help mitigate water shortages and reduce household bills. For the most accurate and relevant updates, consumers are encouraged to consult their local water supplier’s website.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/67f2383b-9bcd-4afa-a842-27bc5580ecaa> - Southern Water, which serves 4.7 million customers in the UK, is exploring plans to import water from Norwegian fjords through a private supplier, Extreme Drought Resilience Service, in response to potential supply shortages and drought. This measure is a contingency plan and costs would be covered by customers' bills. The UK's water infrastructure is aging and insufficient, with significant water loss due to leaks and no new reservoirs built in over three decades. The initiative comes as the sector regulator, Ofwat, has agreed to allow Southern Water to raise bills by 44% over the next five years. Other measures by Southern Water include building a new reservoir in collaboration with Portsmouth Water, developing water recycling plants and contributing to the Abingdon reservoir project. Importing water faces challenges such as high transportation costs, processing needs, and environmental checks. However, it could be more economical than desalination if used sparingly. The urgency for such strategies is highlighted by Southern Water's reliance on groundwater, which causes environmental damage and increases drought vulnerability.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/c1b48062-0ad6-4205-a7b5-376cff7bcc35> - Ofwat, the UK’s water regulator, is seeking over £50 billion in investment for around 30 urgently needed water infrastructure projects to address growing water shortages and a projected daily shortfall of 5 billion litres by 2050. To attract investors, Ofwat is offering assurances such as guaranteed revenues, no competition risks, limited liabilities, and government support. These projects, which include new reservoirs, treatment facilities, and water-transfer schemes, will be privately financed and primarily funded through surcharges on customer bills, sparking public concern given recent sharp bill increases and poor service records from water companies. Notably, water firms, especially Thames Water, have come under fire over financial mismanagement and environmental failings. Meanwhile, the government is expanding Ofwat's powers to claw back undeserved executive bonuses. Critics argue the new investment model, which mimics the Thames Tideway Tunnel financing structure, favors companies by letting them off the hook for past underinvestment while burdening consumers. Ofwat defends the model as necessary for injecting expertise and financing into complex projects not undertaken since water sector privatization. Investors attending a recent conference showed interest, with the regulator pushing ahead with competitive procurement aims to deliver the projects cost effectively.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/69c2d5c8-004e-44f3-99e9-621216c25496> - Copenhagen has repurposed Enghaveparken, a historic public space, to cope with extreme rainfall, following severe cloudbursts that inflicted significant damage on the Danish capital. The city's efforts include building new parks and reservoirs, and upgrading 18th-century sewers to prevent overflow. This shift is part of a global trend, with many major cities experiencing increased floods and droughts due to climate change. Research indicates that about 13% of cities studied have moved to wetter conditions, 7% to drier, and 17% face intensified weather extremes. The warming atmosphere holds more moisture, leading to heavier rainfall and prolonged droughts, with devastating consequences such as the severe flooding and drought scenarios in Valencia and Barcelona. Experts emphasize the need for updated infrastructure and natural flood management. Copenhagen's approach includes storing rainwater underground and redesigning parks to facilitate flood management, setting an example for other cities like New York. The transformation is costly but deemed essential for long-term economic resilience and climate preparedness.