

# DROUGHT RESPONSE

Fact Sheet No. 13b

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Kansas Water Office

## Background

Responding to drought is a fact of life in Kansas. While normal precipitation in eastern Kansas is much greater than in the west, the entire state is subject to drought. In recent years, significant advances have been made in drought monitoring and forecasting. Also, intergovernmental coordination of drought response including development of state response plans has received much more emphasis.

Who's Responsible - We're all responsible! Primary responsibility for drought response varies with the severity of the problem and type of impact. Early-on, before impacts are severe, individual and local government action usually is adequate. Cities and rural water districts may call for voluntary or mandatory water use restrictions. Counties may impose burning bans or take other emergency steps authorized by law. State or federal assistance may become necessary if drought persists and impacts exceed the local capacity to respond.

Due to the sheer magnitude of need, governmental response to agricultural impacts, such as crop and pasture losses comes primarily from the federal government. The USDA Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are of particular importance. Assistance is most often made available upon issuance of a county disaster designation for drought by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Damage assessment reports are made by Farm Service Agency county emergency boards and forwarded to the State Emergency Board for approval. Kansas state agencies then help coordinate the request for a USDA disaster designation, which is made by the Governor.

## Drought Monitoring

The Kansas Water Office is responsible for monitoring drought and notifying the Governor when drought conditions exist within the state. This monitoring relies upon information collected and compiled by several state and federal agencies including the National Weather Service, the Kansas Department of Agriculture, the Kansas State University Weather Data Library and the Applied Remote Sensing Program at the University of Kansas.

In 1999, the U.S. Drought Monitor was introduced. This is a composite tool which uses the Palmer Index and other information to portray drought conditions across the United States. The Monitor has been widely used by the news media since its introduction.

Revised drought monitoring guidelines utilizing three drought response stages were approved by the Kansas Water Authority in 2003. Criteria for each stage are consistent with those for U.S. Drought Monitor intensity categories and the stage designations are consistent with terminology used in municipal water conservation plans in Kansas. Once declared, county drought stages remain in effect until rescinded or revised by the Governor.

Drought conditions are summarized in the *Kansas Drought Report*, which is prepared by the Kansas Water Office. Periodic updates are made as needed.

## Governor's Drought Response Team

Coordination of drought response activities in Kansas is accomplished through the Governor's Drought Response Team. The Kansas Water Office advises the Governor on when to assemble this team, which is comprised of 11 members representing state and federal agencies. The director of the

Kansas Water Office serves as committee chair.

In August 2003, Governor Kathleen Sebelius signed Executive Order 03-17 approving an Operations Plan for the Governor's Drought Response Team. This Operations Plan utilizes a phased response to drought and identifies specific program actions related to each drought stage. The following provides a brief summary of this phased response approach. Additional detail is found in the Operations Plan.

- **Drought Watch** – Impacts include some damage to crops and pastures, high rangeland fire danger and a growing threat of public water supply shortages. The Governor is notified and the Governor's Drought Response Team assembled. Open outdoor burning bans may be imposed. Public water systems may ask for voluntary water use restrictions.
- **Drought Warning** – Crop and pasture losses are likely with some stock water shortages and very high rangeland fire danger. Public water supply shortages are present and some streamflow targets are not being met. Public water systems may impose mandatory water use restrictions. Urgent Kansas Water Marketing Program surplus water supply contracts can be authorized for municipal and industrial users. The Governor may request emergency haying and grazing authorization for Conservation Reserve Program acres.
- **Drought Emergency** – Widespread major crop and pasture losses are accompanied by stock water shortages and extreme rangeland fire danger. Severe public water supply shortages are widespread with

many streamflow targets not met. The Governor may declare an outdoor burning ban. Public water systems may impose additional mandatory water use restrictions. Emergency Kansas Water Marketing Program surplus water supply contracts can be authorized for municipal and industrial users. Emergency water withdrawals from Corps of Engineers reservoirs and state fishing lakes can be authorized. Corps of Engineers emergency water assistance to municipalities is available if needed. The Governor may request a USDA Secretarial disaster designation for drought.

### **Emergency Response**

As with other disasters, situations requiring immediate response (e.g. need for pumps and pipe) are the responsibility of the Kansas Adjutant General's Department – Kansas Division of Emergency Management. ***The 24-hour toll-free contact number for this assistance is 1-800-905-7521.***

### **Additional Information**

The Kansas Water Office web site (<http://www.kwo.org/>) contains current information on drought conditions in Kansas, including county drought stage designations declared by the Governor. The *Kansas Drought Report* is also available here as is a related Fact Sheet: *Drought Preparedness*.

The Governor's Drought Response Team operations plan is available on the KWO web site as are links to other drought information sources.

Please call the Kansas Water Office at 785-296-3185 for additional information.