

Water Conservation Encouraged

It is the hot time of year where resident water use and evapotranspiration (ET) is rapidly increasing. ET includes transpiration (or movement) of water through plants and trees, and evaporation of water from streams, lakes, soil and tree canopy into the atmosphere as water vapor. Also, late Spring and Summer brings out residents watering lawns and gardens, filling swimming pools, playing under sprinkler spray, and washing cars.

However, the Health Department (MCHD) urges caution during these activities as the County of Montgomery among other counties in the state remains under a Drought Watch status established since November 2016 by PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The Watch status encourages county residents to voluntarily reduce water use by five (5) percent, and to use it “wisely”. Although recent precipitation has provided normal levels of rain amounts, surface water levels and soil moisture, Montgomery County groundwater levels still remain in serious deficit in particular areas.

In 2005, after the last official drought, MCHD began a monitoring well network in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The Network consists of 18 wells located throughout the county’s various aquifers (hydrogeologic formations which yield water). Water Quality Management (WQM) staff measure water table depth in relation to ground surface and record the measurements monthly. Data from those measurements can be found in the link below:

<http://groundwaterwatch.usgs.gov/countymap.asp?sa=PA&cc=091>

The data had shown a downward trend of water table levels for the past several months, but appears to be slowly returning of late. WQM issued 19 private water supply permits to replace existing wells that had run dry this past year. So far, seven (7) emergency permits have been issued this year.

Approximately 11% of the county population is served by private wells, but drought conditions also affect public water purveyors using groundwater wells for their supply. If residents located in areas of concern continue to use water at their current rate, they may experience groundwater shortages. Besides causing changes to lifestyle (i.e. not enough water to run a dishwasher and washing machine at same time), these shortages can lead to public health issues such as insufficient water to provide basic living needs such as drinking, cooking, bathing or flushing toilets.

Therefore, MCHD along with DEP encourages all county residents to reduce water by:

- Running water only when necessary;
- Checking for household leaks;
- Running dishwashers and washing machines only with full loads;
- Replacing older appliances with high-efficiency, front-loading models that use about 30 percent less water and 40 to 50 percent less energy; and
- Installing low-flow plumbing fixtures and aerators on faucets.

For more information including other ways to conserve water, please review the links below:

<http://pa-montgomerycounty.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/928>

<https://pa.water.usgs.gov/drought/>

<http://files.dep.state.pa.us/Water/BSDW/Drought/WaterConservationTips.pdf>



Montgomery County Board of Commissioners
Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Chair
Kenneth E. Lawrence, Jr., Vice Chair
Joseph C. Gale, Commissioner

