

Businesses

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washes in Trucksville and Dallas, is fortunate to have artesian wells which "always push out water, even in the droughts."

He doesn't recycle water in his two car washes. "There's no problem - I have plenty of water. I'm not under any restrictions yet," he said.

Styling salon operators use water to wash and rinse customers' hair and as part of permanent waves and other hair treatments.

"We're doing shorter rinses - only about two to three minutes - and don't let the water run while we're lathering a customer's hair," said Sam Roberts Hair Fashions acting manager Robert DelConte.

"We're extremely conscious of the water situation and use it only when it's necessary."

DelConte has a well at home, which he is equally conscientious with. He runs only full loads of dishes and laundry, and doesn't water the lawn.

"Water is a necessary commodity," he said. "We can't do without it. People must work together to make conservation work."

"Our aquifers are down from normal, but they're not critical yet."

Joe Bontrager
National Utilities

The drought has also forced all Back Mountain communities to prohibit open burning, which a Dallas Township resident learned about the hard way Monday, when police and firefighters responded to two reports of a fire in his yard around 1 p.m.

"People think just because we get a few showers, that everything is all right now," said supervisor Frank Wagner. "The woods are still bone dry - one good gust of wind and the place could have gone right up in flames."

Water companies see lower wells, reservoirs

The past week's light rain was far short of the amount needed to lift the drought emergency declared Sept. 20 by Gov. Tom Ridge.

Ridge proclaimed an emergency in 21 eastern and north central counties, including Luzerne

County.

Mandatory restrictions on water use include bans on all non-essential uses of water - watering lawns or golf courses, washing sidewalks or cars with hoses and filling or topping off pools.

Area water companies have been asking customers to voluntarily cut back on their usage for the past month; however National Utilities, Inc., has gone further in its request for a 15 percent voluntary reduction in customer use.

National Utilities owns four small water companies in Lehman and Kingston townships, Harveys Lake and Noxen and supplies its 1,516 customers from wells.

"Our aquifers are down from normal, but they're not critical yet," said manager Joe Bontrager. "It's about the same as the 1991 drought. We haven't requested

rationing yet, but if we see continued low water pressure during peak usage time or if our storage level falls, that could change. I would have liked to see the governor make this proclamation three or four weeks earlier than he did."

National Utilities' wells supplied more water during July and August of this year than they did during the same period in 1994, mostly due to the extended hot weather, he added.

United Water's vice-president and general manager Greg Wyatt has also found the aquifers (layers of rock which carry water) in the company's nine Back Mountain wells to be lower than normal.

"One well is down about 50 percent, which may be due to the drought," he said. "But we have another well which can back it up if necessary. We have a geologist studying it."

United Water serves 8,308 customers in Dallas Township, Dallas Borough and Harveys Lake.

Wyatt is confident that United Water will be able to meet its customers' needs. "Typically,

customers do conserve water in droughts," he said.

Two reservoirs owned by Pennsylvania Gas and Water (PG&W) at Huntsville and Ceasetown are at 64 percent of normal, comparable to where they were in 1991, according to public relations officer Juneann Greco.

The utility also owns two filtration plants and four small water companies serving 1,314 customers

in Kingston Township and Dallas Borough.

"If trends continue and we don't get enough rain by the end of the year, we may consider mandatory rationing," she said. "The next step would be for us to require all commercial and industrial users to cut back their water use by 25 percent. We're encouraging customers to voluntarily conserve now."

Prison

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"This is nothing in comparison to the prison's total budget," said Ed Chesnovich of the SCID Concerned Citizens, who met with prison officials September 22. "It works out to about \$7 per inmate per month."

"Money shouldn't be a factor with the water situation," Hasay said. "Some homes in my district already have had wells dry up or give them problems. You should use the reservoir all the time - it's money well spent to protect our residents."

His staff made an emergency call to Horn's office Friday to attempt to persuade Horn to order SCID to stop using its wells, but got nowhere.

Horn told Hasay's staff he wants "substantial proof" that the jail's wells are adversely affecting those of nearby residents.

"Our concern is to protect and preserve the water left in the ground and our own wells," said Walter Ziencavage, whose farm isn't far from the prison. "Give us a definite guarantee we won't run dry."

Chesnovich said he knows people whose 300-foot deep well ran dry. Drillers had to drill to 700 feet - at \$16 a foot - to get any usable water.

"At 500 feet they only got a trickle," he said.

He knows of another well just drilled at Bulford Farms - 900 feet deep.

"We had an agreement with the Department of Corrections about the water," said Jackson Township supervisor Walter Glogowski. "With a new governor in Harrisburg, things have changed. There's only a limited amount of water in the ground. We'll do whatever is necessary to get Governor Ridge to pay attention to our situation."

The prison is conserving water by installing smaller shower heads, making daily inspections for leaks and discontinuing the use of outdoor hoses, according to superintendent Mike Stepanick.

Water has been a concern at SCID since January, 1987, when superintendent Joseph Ryan wrote to deputy corrections commissioner Lowell D. Hewitt: "I am



POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE

Dallas Township police and the Department of Environmental Protection are investigating a violation of the township's emergency open burning declaration by a Hemlock Street resident. Firefighters extinguished the small smoky fire Monday around 1 p.m.

"If we wait until we run out of water, it will be too late; and the security of the institution could very likely be jeopardized."

Joseph Ryan
Former prison superintendent, in a 1987 letter to the corrections dept.

essential to close down the inmates' showers for a 24-hour period in order to make up for the water deficit. This action was necessary even though we have just had an unusually wet fall and early winter..."

At the time the prison was operating two wells. If one went down, the other well couldn't supply the prison's entire need, he continued.

"If we wait until we run out of water, it will be too late; and the security of the institution could very likely be jeopardized," Ryan concluded.

The pipeline to the Ceasetown Reservoir was built in 1993, costing more than \$600,000. After

SCID and state corrections officials refused to use it, the state spent an additional \$43,000 for a hydrogeologist to study the water supply around the prison.

Interpretations of the study vary, depending on who is quoting it.

Although it shows that up to 10 neighboring private wells could go dry if the prison continues to use its wells, prison officials say the study shows it's all right to use them and not rely on the pipeline.

In an abrupt about-face, corrections commissioner Joseph Lehman agreed in late 1994 to use the pipeline for all the prison's water needs. Ironically, the area had just experienced an extremely wet year, causing the water table to rise. Water was actually running out of the prison's well heads at one point.

Horn reversed this decision in June.

Hasay's staff has requested that residents contact him at 477-3752 if they are having problems with their wells.

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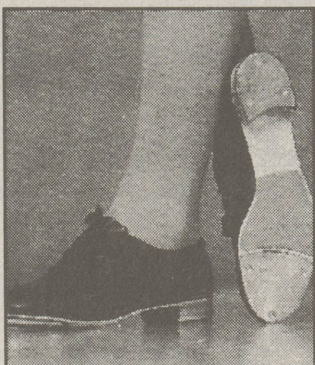
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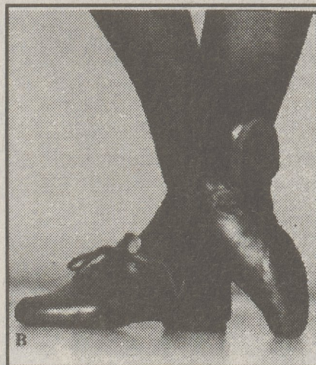
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