

What is a Drought Order?

Drought orders apply only to water providers. An order from the Environment Agency, means a water board can restrict their output to conserve reservoir stocks. It also means, they can ban local authorities from watering parks, gardens, golf courses, cricket pitches and other sporting venues. It makes no difference to what consumers are allowed to do when an area has a hosepipe ban.

Water Woes

More than 13 million people in London and south east England are already under a residential ban on using hoses or sprinklers to wash cars or water lawns. South east England will be the worst hit by the drought, but the south west, Midlands and Wales are vulnerable too.

Although there has been a lot of rain over the past few weeks, that won't make a significant difference to the drought. The Met Office say it's the winter rains that are needed to replenish the water aquifers and the last two have been dry. Winter rain allows water supplies to recharge. Rain in December seeps into the ground, but rainfall in spring and summer tends to evaporate or be sucked up by trees, plants and flowers.

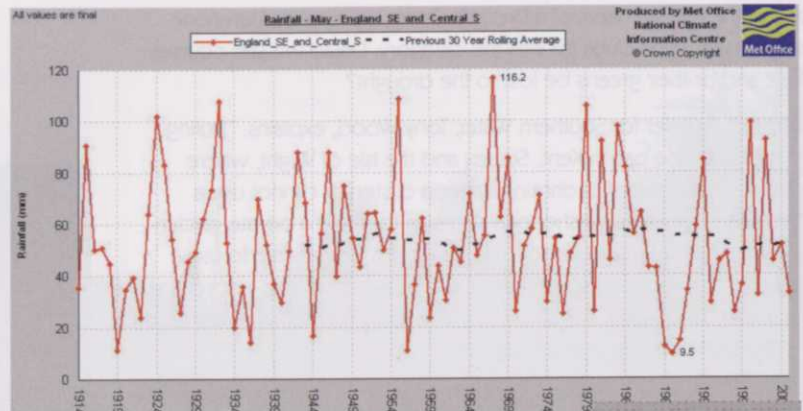
Parts of southern England have had the two driest consecutive winters since 1920-22.

Figures released by the Met Office show that south east and central southern England have had:

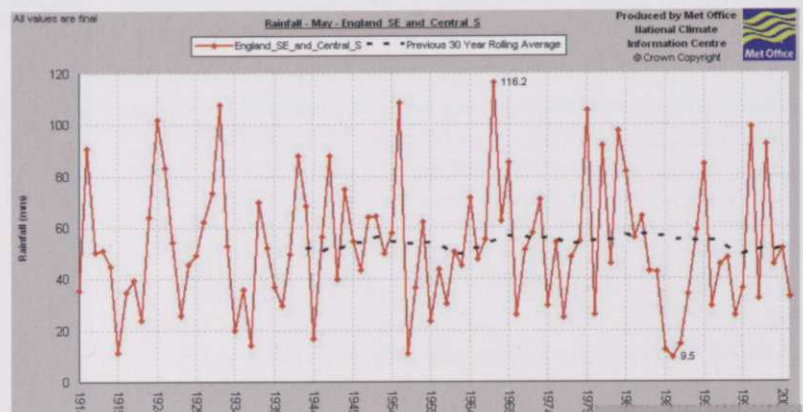
- The driest November 2004 to January 2006 in over 80 years, with just 724mm of rain;
- November 2004 to January 2006 was the second driest 15 month period on record;
- 13 of the last 15 months have recorded below the 1961-1990 long-term average, having only 72% of the average, which is 1001mm.

May rainfall figures (up to May 22)

- UK 83.4mm, 26% for this period in the month but not record-breaking - the wettest May was 1967 with 128mm.
- South east and central southern England (where the main issue is) 68.6mm, 31% above average.



May rainfall for south east and central southern England since 1914
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Annual rainfall for south east and central southern England since 1914
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For comparison -

THE WORLD'S DRIEST PLACES

Place	Location	Rainfall in Millimetres/Inches	
Dry Valleys	Antarctica	None in 2000 yrs	
Death Valley	California, USA	3.0	0.1
Arica Desert	Chile	3.0	0.1
Gobi Desert	Central Asia	5.0	0.2
Sahara Desert	(parts of) North Africa	25.0	1.0
Lake Eyre Basin	Australia	101 to 152	4.0 to 6.0

AND SOME OF THE WETTEST

Mount Waialeale	Hawaii	12,344	486
Cherrapunji	India	10,874	428
Mount Cameroon	Cameroon	10,160	400
Sprinkling Tarn	Cumbria, England	6,528	257
North-west Washington State	USA	2,997	118

Prospects for rainfall across the UK through the summer months is uncertain, however, it is likely that rainfall will be sufficient to alleviate the water shortages affecting some regions.