

Drought

Droughts occur when an area has less precipitation (rain, snow, sleet or hail) than normal for a long period of time, or when water shortages occur for other reasons such as a river drying up, or people overusing water supplies.

A lack of water can have a devastating effect on people, plants and animals. We need to drink clean water to survive and water is essential to grow our food, but we use water for other activities, such as washing, too. Some parts of the world even rely on water to generate electricity.

Drought is a serious concern for farmers who need water for their crops and livestock. At their worst, droughts can cause deserts to form, and can trigger famines (when people starve through lack of food). The effects of a drought build up slowly, and can continue long after rainfall returns. Sometimes the fertility of farmland is destroyed forever.

All parts of the world can experience drought, but some suffer more severely than others. Africa, for example, has regular drought conditions, and in Australia, droughts bring the risk of wildfires that spread quickly in high temperatures and strong winds. In 2013, Australia had on average over 4,500 wildfires a week!

In many hot, dry regions, winds can also create sand storms that stretch over 1,000 feet (305 metres) high. These swirling storms of dust – with winds of up to 25 mph (40 kph) – can get in your eyes, ears and mouth, making it difficult to breathe.

Did you know?

- From 1969–1980, Africa experienced a 12-year drought affecting 20 countries and over 150 million people. More recently, countries in East Africa have suffered a severe drought since 2011, and food is in short supply.
- In the USA in the 1930s, a severe drought in the southern plains lasted for about 10 years and the area became known as the 'Dust Bowl'. Winds brought dust storms, farming was badly affected, and thousands of people were forced to flee their homes.
- Camels are able to close their nostrils and have a 'third eyelid' to protect their eyes from dust in the event of a sand storm – useful when you live in the desert!
- Do you leave the tap running when you brush your teeth? If you turn the tap off, you can save around 12 litres of water each time!

The UK has a lot of rainfall, so drought conditions are thankfully rare, but in July 2013, the country experienced a mini heatwave – the third warmest July on record. June had also been a dry month, so the ground warmed up quickly, warming the air above it, too. Young children and the elderly were particularly at risk and over 760 deaths were attributed to the unusually warm conditions.



This poster shows what extreme drought will do to land.



Find out some good advice for staying safe in a drought, then design a poster offering advice to others...

Drought Safety Poster

Design a poster to alert people to the dangers of hot weather and droughts and offer advice on what they can do to stay safe.



