

Dried Out



The view out my window as I write is white—the snow is falling quickly and heavily, with up to 8 in. expected by the end of the day. Schools are closed and the chatter around the office is whether the commute home will take two hours or three.

With precipitation like this, it is hard to believe that the Chicago area, along with much of northern Illinois, is experiencing a drought. According to the latest data from the U.S. Drought Monitor—a partnership between the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration that monitors drought conditions across the country—a good portion of the state is experiencing abnormally dry or

moderate drought conditions.

Illinois is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to drought in the U.S., though—one glance at the U.S. Drought Monitor's map and it is clear that the situation is grim. More than half of the country is experiencing drought, with much of that portion covered by the fiery red that indicates extreme or exceptional drought, and most of it marked with the "L"s that indicate long-term drought.

A major result of the drought is the lowering of groundwater levels across the country. For those who rely on private wells for drinking water—approximately 15% of the U.S. population, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency—lower water levels can have a multitude of consequences.

As Gerry Bulfin of Clean Water Systems & Stores Inc. describes in his article, "The Dangers of Drought" (page 6), these are consequences go much further than simply having less water. Water quality can change. Pumps and other equipment can be damaged. A well may need to be drilled deeper, or a new well may need to be drilled.

If your area is affected by drought—and even if it's not—take the time to remind your customers how important it is to regularly clean wells and monitor water quality. According to Neil Mansuy of Subsurface Technologies Inc., regular well maintenance has a multitude of benefits, from lower cleaning costs to assurance that water is of the highest possible quality. (For more from Mansuy on well cleaning and maintenance, see "Well Wellness," page 42.)

Your drought recommendations don't have to end with regular maintenance and water quality testing, however. Urge customers to follow any water restrictions that may be in place in your region. Encourage them to do what they can to conserve and reuse water, perhaps by using water-efficient fixtures or installing a rain barrel. The drought may have no end in sight—but even small efforts can add up to big results in combating its effects.

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