

Talking Points for Drought

Talking points and message maps for local health professionals

If you are approached by the media regarding a reported drought health risk in your jurisdiction, the following talking points may be used. Start with message A1 or A2, then follow the instructions within that box.

A1

We were notified by the Medical Examiner/Coroner about a fatality possibly due to extreme drought. Our condolences go out to the family.

Go to message B1 or B2.

A2

We have *not* been notified of any recent fatalities linked to extreme drought conditions.

Go to message C.

B1

Out of respect for the family, we are unable to share any details.

Go to message C.

B2

On [insert date], a [gender] [“___ years old” or “between the ages of ___ and ___”] died during the storm.

Go to message C.

C

Drought can be long lasting and result in many adverse health effects. People should remain safe by:

- a. Monitoring drought and fire hazard conditions in your area.
- b. Checking on family, friends and neighbors who do not have air conditioning, who spend much of their time alone or who are more likely to be affected by the heat and the drought.
- c. Conserving water.
- d. For more information visit *[insert relevant website]*.

MESSAGE MAPS ABOUT DROUGHT SAFETY

Message mapping is one of the most important risk communication tools that public health agencies can employ. The goal of a message map is to convey important information in a concise and easy to understand fashion.



General Guidelines for Completing a Message Map

- Stick to three key messages or one key message with three parts for each underlying concern or specific question.
- Keep key messages brief. The reader should ideally spend less than 10 seconds per line.
- Develop messages that are easily understood by the target audience. (For communications with the general public, use a 6th to 8th grade readability level.)
- Place messages within a message set. The most important messages should occupy the first and last positions.
- Develop key messages that cite credible third parties.
- Use graphics and other visual aids to enhance key messages.
- Keep a positive tone. Messages should be solution oriented and constructive. Try to balance negative messages with positive ones.
- Avoid unnecessary use of “absolute” words, such as no, not, never, nothing, and none.⁵

The following is a message map that could be used when addressing the general public regarding drought safety.

Key Messages <i>Three key messages</i>	Supporting Information <i>Three pieces of supporting information for each key message</i>
Message 1 Monitor drought conditions in your area.	Supporting Info 1 Wisconsin can experience drought. It most commonly occurs during late summer. Supporting Info 2 Drought can be long-lasting or short-term. It is important to be prepared for drought of any duration. Supporting Info 3 Heed drought warnings in your area and stay up to date on conditions with the U.S. Drought Monitor (www.droughtmonitor.unl.edu).
Message 2 Conserve your water supply during a drought.	Supporting Info 1 Be conscious of your water use. Limit the amount of water you use both inside and outside your home. Supporting Info 2 Recycle/reuse water when you can. For example, use leftover drinking water to water plants. Supporting Info 3 If there is a boil water notice, follow the guidelines for safe water practices and use your water only for approved purposes.
Message 3 If you must be out during the hottest times of the day during drought, be alert for signs of heat illness.	Supporting Info 1 Symptoms include feeling hot, weak, dizzy or faint, cramping and muscle spasms, nausea, or rapid pulse. Supporting Info 2 Protect yourself by limiting physical activities, drinking plenty of water, and wearing light, loose-fitting clothing. Supporting Info 3 Call 911 or seek medical attention if you or someone you know develops heat illness.



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