

Drought facts for kids

Kids Encyclopedia Facts

Drought is a continuous period of dry weather, when an area gets less than its normal amount of [rain](#), over months or even years. [Crops](#) and other [plants](#) need [water](#) to grow, and land [animals](#) need it to [live](#). It can become dangerous to people and other [animals](#); causing [famine](#) and even creating [deserts](#).

A drought is a natural event, caused by other [weather](#) events like [El Niño](#) and high-pressure systems. Drought can also be triggered by [deforestation](#) (people cutting down [forests](#)), by [global warming](#), and by diverting [rivers](#) or emptying [lakes](#).

Drought is a [disaster](#) which usually takes place slowly. It is often difficult to decide when a drought started and sometimes when it ends too. Its effects often build up slowly over a long period of time and may last from months to years after rain resumes.

Many [people](#) die every year in [famines](#) due to drought in [subsistence farming](#) areas. [Conflicts](#) can result from drought conditions.



Dry earth as a result of a drought in the [Sonoran Desert, Mexico](#)

Types

As a drought persists, the conditions surrounding it gradually worsen and its impact on the local population gradually increases. People tend to define droughts in three main ways:

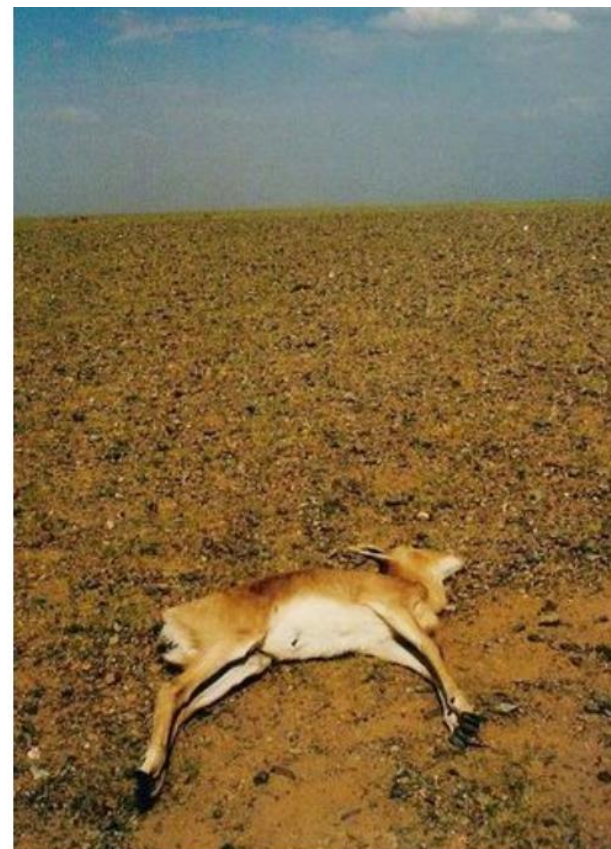
1. [Meteorological](#) drought is brought about when there is a prolonged time with less than average precipitation. Meteorological drought usually precedes the other kinds of drought.

2. **Agricultural** droughts affect crop production or the ecology of the **range**. This condition can also arise independently from any change in precipitation levels when **soil** conditions and erosion triggered by poorly planned agricultural endeavors cause a shortfall in water available to the crops. However, in a traditional drought, it is caused by an extended period of below average precipitation.

3. **Hydrological** drought is brought about when the water reserves available in sources such as **aquifers**, **lakes** and **reservoirs** fall below the **statistical average**. Hydrological drought tends to show up more slowly because it involves stored water that is used but not replenished. Like an agricultural drought, this can be triggered by more than just a loss of rainfall. For instance, **Kazakhstan** was recently awarded a large amount of money by the **World Bank** to restore water that had been diverted to other nations from the **Aral Sea** under **Soviet** rule. Similar circumstances also place their largest lake, Balkhash, at risk of completely drying out.

Consequences of drought

The effects of droughts and water shortages can be divided into three groups: environmental, economic and social consequences. In the case of environmental effects: lower surface and subterranean water levels, lower flow levels (with a decrease below the minimum leading to direct danger for amphibian life), increased pollution of surface water, the drying out of wetlands, more and larger fires, higher deflation intensity, losing biodiversity, worse health of trees and the appearance of pests and den droid diseases. Economic losses include lower agricultural, forests, game and fishing output, higher food production costs, lower energy production levels in hydro plants, losses caused by depleted water tourism and transport revenue, problems with water supply for the energy sector and technological processes in metallurgy, mining, the chemical, paper, wood, foodstuff industries etc., disruption of water supplies for municipal economies. Meanwhile, social costs include the negative effect on the health of people directly exposed to this phenomenon (excessive heat waves), possible limitation of water supplies and its increased pollution levels, high food costs, stress caused by failed harvests, etc. This is why droughts and fresh water shortages may be considered as a factor which increases the gap between developed and developing countries.



A Mongolian gazelle dead due to drought.