

'Bad days await': Istanbul dams run low in summer heat

September 1 2023, by Kadir DEMIR



Istanbul's water reservoirs are less than one-third full after another hot and dry summer.

The bank of screens in Ismail Aydin's Istanbul water management system control room flashes a worrying number: 29.7 percent.

That is the capacity level to which Istanbul's water reservoirs have dropped after another steamy summer put Turkey's largest city on the edge of a potential catastrophe.

Aydin does not want to sow panic and speaks in reassuring tones.

The [rainy season](#) is approaching and [water levels](#) should pick up in the coming weeks.

But Aydin admits what the city's 16 million official—and 20 million estimated—inhabitants have known for some time.

"We've had a [dry season](#)," the water and sewage administration chief said.

"Water levels were at 60 percent this time last year," he said. "It dropped down to 14 percent in 2014, so this is the second-lowest in the past 10 years."

Istanbul is surrounded by a web of 11 dams that fill up with water when the heaviest precipitation falls in November and December.

But [global warming](#) caused by human-caused greenhouse gas emissions is changing [weather patterns](#) and giving Aydin constant stress.

Istanbul has had barely any precipitation at all this summer and water usage has soared because of the heat.

Turkey as a whole experienced the hottest July on record and broke the 50-degree Celsius (122-degrees Fahrenheit) mark for the first time in modern history on August 14.



Water management chief Ismail Aydin is trying to teach Istanbulites to use less water.

Booming growth

The city could ship in extra supplies of water by sea or road should the dams run completely dry—although no specific plans have been laid yet for that gloomy possibility.

Istanbul's problems are compounded by its phenomenal growth.

The city had almost as many dams when its population was just over five million people 30 years ago and [water consumption](#) was not a hot topic in the news.

Officials now make regular media appearances pressing Istanbulites to conserve water any way they can.

Aydin's department sent a mass text message during a particularly hot spell warning that the situation was becoming unsustainable.

"The storage volume of our dams in Istanbul is approximately 868 million cubic meters. But Istanbul's annual consumption is 1.1 billion cubic meters," Aydin told AFP.

"Istanbul's (dams) do not have enough water to last a full year. Istanbul is a city in need of continuous rainfall. Our groundwater is not enough."



Istanbul has had little precipitation this summer and water usage has soared because of the heat.

The lack of rain is turning some parts of the emptied dams into rolling meadows that flocks of sheep and goats roam on the city's outskirts.

Pensioner Nejat Karakas grew up around water and likes to visit the dams to while away the time.

He leaned glumly against the side of an upturned rowboat lying on the cracked dry bed and contemplated [climate change](#).

"It makes me sad. We're not used to seeing it like this," the 68-year-old said. "If there is no rain between now and October, bad days await Istanbul."

Worried youth

Aydin's attempts to raise awareness and change Istanbulites' habits appear to be making some inroads.

Driver Hasan Sadikoglu said he has fitted a large plastic bottle into his toilet tank to conserve a liter of water with every flush.

"When the children brush their teeth, the tap is opened and closed," the 53-year-old said. "One brush, one open."



'It makes me sad. We're not used to seeing it like this,' says pensioner Nejat Karakas.



Istanbul's water levels are the lowest since 2014.

Aydin's department has also announced plans to install special devices on faucets of households that consume more than a set amount of water every month.

The idea is to reduce households' water pressure once the usage limit is breached.

"Very effective measures should be taken, especially in water management," Aydin said. "Saving is a priority, recycling is a priority."

Student Mine Altintas said she already tries to conserve water while

washing dishes and doing laundry.

But she worries that this will not be enough.

"All of us, the whole country and even the whole world, is worried," the 18-year-old said.

"I don't know what will happen in 10 years. I am still young, and I don't know how much [water](#) we will have later on."

© 2023 AFP

Citation: 'Bad days await': Istanbul dams run low in summer heat (2023, September 1) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-09-bad-days-await-istanbul-summer.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.