

Verona and Pisa ration drinking water amid historic drought

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Until 31 August, drinking water cannot be used for watering vegetable patches, gardens and sports fields, washing cars, filling swimming pools and any other activity not strictly necessary for human needs, both regional authorities announced over the weekend.

Using drinking water for domestic purposes, personal cleaning and hygiene is still permitted in Pisa and Verona, which is the second-largest city in northeast Italy with more than 250,000 inhabitants.

Anyone found breaking the restrictions, which were signed off in Verona by the city's new mayor Damiano Tomasi, can be fined up to €500 (\$522).

However, Verona's regional authority added that "any use for the purposes described above and prohibited, although not recommended, can only take place from 9 pm to 6 am".

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The mayor of Pisa, Michele Conti, brought in identical restrictions on drinking water over the weekend, with penalties ranging from €100 (\$104) to €500.

More than one hundred municipalities in northern Italy have adopted measures to conserve water, but Verona and Pisa are some of the largest cities in the region to do so.

As with its European neighbours, Italy has faced an unusually early heat wave, alongside a severe lack of rainfall and snow melt from the Alps, which have been linked to climate change.

Italy's northern Po Valley, which produces around 40% of the country's food, including wheat, is experiencing its worst drought since 1952.

It has barely rained for around four months and the water level of the Po River, the longest river in Italy, is seven metres below average.

"This drought is unique in history due to the combination of two anomalies - the lack of rain, on top of the elevated temperature, which is directly linked to climate change," said Luca Mercalli, the president of the Italian Meteorological Society.

Lakes Maggiore and Garda are below average water levels for this time of year, while further south the level of the Tiber, which flows through Rome, has also dropped.

Another impact of the water scarcity is that the production of hydroelectric energy has fallen sharply as there is less flowing water to power the dams.

Hydroelectric installations, located in the mountainous areas of northwest Italy, produce nearly 20% of the country's energy.

Several regions have called on Rome to declare a state of emergency to enable further financial aid and civil defence measures to combat the problem.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi has announced that steps could follow as soon as Monday when the government will take on emergency planning for the worst-hit

regions.

Source:

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