



PIPE DOWN
Kingston-upon-Thames residents at the police station, main picture. Top, gardeners at the Addison Garden allotments; Kim Wilde, above

Amnesty for hosepipe owners as drought bites

A Hand in Your Hose campaign is being launched in parts of the country where the ban will come into effect later this week. **Emily Dugan** reports

The worst drought for three decades is forcing the Government to call for Britain's gardeners to hand in their hoses under a nationwide amnesty, *The Independent on Sunday* has learnt.

People living in areas where the ban comes into force on Thursday are to be given the opportunity to surrender garden hoses at local police stations. Water providers have already set up phone lines so that people can report neighbours who flout the ban, but now the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has asked the police to set up "hosepipe bins" at stations for people to deposit their sprinklers and hoses.

The Government hopes the "Hand in Your Hose" campaign

will help to build compliance with the ban and remove the water-guzzling devices from gardens permanently in regions which are most vulnerable to drought, such as the South-east. Anybody caught watering their lawns and flowerbeds or filling paddling pools with a hosepipe after 5 April could face a £1,000 fine.

The singer and award-winning garden designer Kim Wilde, who is fronting the Hand in Your Hose campaign, said: "I love gardening but if we don't all do our bit when the hosepipe ban comes in we'll be facing a serious crisis. Handing in your hose to the police removes temptation and sets a good example to your neighbours."

A pilot scheme was being trialled yesterday in Kingston-upon-Thames. By midday a queue had already formed on the steps of the police station, as people prepared to hand over a variety of watering and sprinkling systems. Jo Cobley, 42, was waiting with her son Daniel, eight, and her 30m Maxi Pro Hozelock. "It seems a shame because I love my hose," she said, "but it makes sense to hand it in when you've got kids because they might play with it when you're not

WATERWORKS

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimates that every year the average British household with a garden uses enough water through its hosepipe to fill more than three Olympic-sized swimming pools. In Kent, known for being the "Garden of England", the national average is almost doubled.

A recent study undertaken by the Environment Agency indicated that, given the choice, 27 per cent of UK residents would rather go without a shower for a week than forgo the use of their hosepipe for the same period.

During the last hosepipe ban in 2010, Thames Water received a total of 309 calls from individuals wishing to inform on their neighbour's illicit hosepipe use. The most common complaint, accounting for nearly a quarter of all calls, was over the unlawful use of ornamental fountains.

UK companies specialising in the retail of sprinklers and other garden-watering equipment are estimating net losses of more than £10m per week. Should the ban continue over a period



of months, this could result in several of the smaller companies going into liquidation. However, the sales of buckets, used to collect rainwater, have soared.

The RSPCA has issued a warning over the welfare of outdoor fish during the hosepipe ban. Figures show that the 2010 ban was responsible for the death of at least six koi carp as a result of owners being unable to use a hosepipe to top up their ponds.

looking." In return, they were being given a free "I've piped down!" badge.

A spokeswoman for the Metropolitan Police's Kingston Safer Neighbourhood team said: "We know that every time there is a hosepipe ban there will always be people who think it's not their problem. Running out of water is no laughing matter. We hope gardeners will take this opportunity to hand in their hoses without fear of reprisals and remove temptation from their backyards."

Just a few hours earlier at the nearby Addison Garden allotments, keen vegetable growers were giving their crops a last water before handing in their hoses. Joan McConn, 65, said she would do so reluctantly. "They've said that anyone caught with a hose can be kicked off the allotments. There are a lot of snitches and giving it to the police means you can't be accused of anything."

One member of the allotment society, who wished to remain anonymous, said she planned to flout the ban. The 81-year-old added: "I paid £29.99 for this jet hose and I'm not going to hand it over to the police just because Thames Water can't stop their pipes leaking."

All hosepipes collected by the authorities will be stored in a secure unit until winter. Those wanting their pipes back will be able to apply in writing from 1 November.